



920.04      L63

---

## Keep Your Card in This Pocket

---

Books will be issued only on presentation of proper library cards.

Unless labeled otherwise, books may be retained for four weeks. Borrowers finding books marked, defaced or mutilated are expected to report same at library desk; otherwise the last borrower will be held responsible for all imperfections discovered.

The card holder is responsible for all books drawn on his card.

Penalty for over-due books 2c a day plus cost of notices.

Lost cards and change of residence must be reported promptly.



**PUBLIC LIBRARY**  
**Kansas City, Mo.**

---

## Keep Your Card in this Pocket

---

3 1148 00877 6700

WILHELM G. LIEBER  
INC.

## DATE DUE

31 JUN	9 JU '67
27 OCT '67	27 MR '38
11 JUN	29 JUN '68
11 JUN	5 JUN '39
1 JUN	2 MAY '39
25 JUN	2 MAY '39
5 JUN	67 MAY '38 21
6 MR H	36 MAY '69 92
21 MR H	MAY 15 '48
10 MAY	MAR 20 '48
15 JUL	APR 17 '50
5 JUL	NOV 27 '60 46
20 OCT	APR 16 '60
22 NOV	MAY JUN 18 1982
19 DEC	1989 MURRA
14 MAR	
20 OCT	

AUG 15 1982

WILHELMUS  
VAN  
DUINEN  
1810 26.6.1892  
OUD

PUBLIC LIBRARY  
KANSAS CITY  
MO

YAAQUBI QUDSI  
VITTO RAZMAN  
Om

PLUTONIAN  
STUDIES  
IN  
SUBLIME FAILURE CITY

110

BY THE SAME AUTHOR  
THE GREEK ANTHOLOGY  
THE EPIC OF JUTLAND

PUBLIC LIBRARY  
KANSAS CITY  
MO

WILLIAM MILLER  
1812-1890

OBITUARY



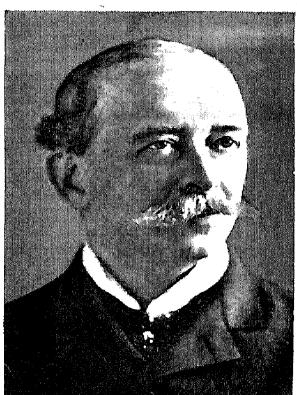
LORD CURZON



CHARLES STEWART PARNELL



CARDINAL NEWMAN



MORETON FREWEN



COVENTRY PATMORE

SHANE LESLIE  
STUDIES ON  
IN  
SUBLIME FAILURE



LONDON  
ERNEST BENN LIMITED

# WAGGLES ON WHEELS

## WITH DRAWINGS



First Published in

1932

Printed

in

Great Britain

Au 25 '32.

## CONTENTS

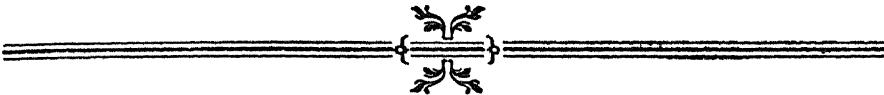
CARDINAL NEWMAN	<i>page</i> 9
CHARLES STEWART PARNELL	<i>page</i> 59
COVENTRY PATMORE	<i>page</i> 113
LORD CURZON	<i>page</i> 179
MORETON FREWEN	<i>page</i> 247



CARDINAL NEWMAN

1801-1890





## CARDINAL NEWMAN

EVEN while living, Cardinal Newman was a legend as precious to Anglican as to Catholic, although his teaching caused the greatest mistrust to successive Churches. He stood out singular, saintly and single-minded in the respect of men. Such had been his ecclesiastical fame, such his intellectual splendour that it seemed difficult not to account him an astounding success. Yet the analysis of truth was dismally remote from the general belief. After his historical but hot-house mission in Oxford, he was understood to have become a happy recluse surrounded by adoring disciples with the music of "Lead, kindly Light" echoing in his ears from all the churches of the English world. Presumably, also, he lived in the loving approval of the Pope, for his old age had been decked in that scarlet, which is the last infirmity of noble-minded churchmen. London proved too momentous for him. Rome was too distracting to his contemplative mind. To practise Catholicism he had chosen a quiet suburb of Birmingham. There he remained secluded as on Mount Athos, inspired as on Mount Parnassus, and as oracular as though he dwelt on Mount Sinai itself. Such was the general opinion.

In the churches of the Establishment he was no longer seen, but his living legend haunted the

## SUBLIME FAILURES

memories of men, a legend of shy leadership and pervasive influence at Oxford, a legend of apostolic voice and gesture, a legend of persecution by unseeing Heads and unwise Bishops, and of spiritual wrestling at Littlemore like Jacob at the ford and of his final passing to Rome, while the silver trumpets sounded from the Dome of St. Peter's. Since he had become a Catholic, there had been added the legend of the beauty and style of his English, of his unfailing erudition in Primitive Church history, and of his life as a hermit broken only from time to time as he stretched forth a finger and claimed some rash thinker who ventured into the Roman orbit. His repute was more of a magician than a cleric. He could easily do anything with words and almost anything with a difficult dogma. In a day when all clergy received high respect, he received a species of veneration. Little straws perhaps showed the power of the wind in which he walked, clothed like a Seraph upon earth. We have heard of an Anglican Archbishop running from the Athenæum to see Father Newman shuffle by in his seedy Oratorian rig and standing mute as though not daring to address the hero of his Oxford days. And Lord Rosebery accounted it one of the disappointments of his life that he was not warned when Newman preached for the last time in London, at the requiem of Hope-Scott.

If the legend of Newman was vague, it was a glittering one and as such would have survived his death. But it has not survived his biography.

## CARDINAL NEWMAN

Wilfred Ward's official biography of Newman, though packed and pasted with fascinating material, left the picture of an ecclesiastical Mrs. Gummidge, a poor forlorn creature, with whom nothing went right, who required to be soothed and humoured at any moment from bursting into weeping recriminations. Those who had cherished the myth, found a discoloration of the halo. The Oratorians were left with a wailing scarecrow in place of the human hero they had known. Cardinal Manning's personality had been lately revealed strong and sinister against the dark clouding of his biography. Newman's seemed to dissolve itself into ink-stained tears. If his career was to be represented as a failure, was it necessarily lachrymose?

Newman's life was always sheltered. His temperament had the artistic touch and it was readily rasped. But seclusion never softened or effeminated him. He could suffer, but fiercely and not unto self-pity. His oft-quoted tears were emotional but not hysterical. Wiry and ascetic of body, his intellect, however subtle, remained resilient and almost steely.

His Oxford career had been a triumph half-accepted by himself and bitterly resented by his opponents. He had been swept along in the front rather than at the head of a Movement. He could not lead, but he could raise and revive armies. But he found it difficult to move in the contemporary movement flowing through the Catholic Church. Unwilling

## SUBLIME FAILURES

to meet the high tide of the Ultramontane Crusade, he fell into backwater. He was stigmatized as a Gallican or a Minimizer. There were times when he displayed fussiness or sentimentality and bursts of bright temper, but he never collapsed behind the scenes of his own mind. Anglican or Catholic, who attempted to bite his heel, was smitten at the appropriate moment in the jaw. Sometimes angry and often miserable, he never showed himself weak, never a whining old maid.

Newman had never been normalized or deadened by a British public school. His mother begged him off Winchester, which was a home of puerile cruelty. Manning had guarded himself through a career at Harrow, but he was a stripling cricketer. Newman's character was unspoilt and unalloyed when he reached Oxford. His curious mind proceeded to build up a faith out of sceptical materials, such as Locke and Gibbon. He had an early and tremendous advantage over other seekers for truth. He beheld "two and only two absolute and luminously self-evident beings". They were his Creator and himself. It followed that the best and holiest of pastors or masters must appear less luminous.

His Anglican career reads like the Industrious Curate's romance: Scholar of Trinity, Fellow of Oriel and Vicar of St. Mary's. And then came the Oxford Tracts. The University was ready for a new ideal. The last of the Non-Jurors was dead and the Jacobites were relegated to Scotland. Newman

## CARDINAL NEWMAN

turned over the dry dust with a wand and signalled treasure in the rubbish-heaps of the Church. He touched the wheezy and shrivelled Establishment, and she became the blushing Bride of Christ. Absurd old gentlemen, whose orthodoxy was measured by the bottles of port they consumed, were hailed as Fathers of the Church. Young men heard him preach and became Apostles. Mastership over his disciples was followed by the flattering adoration which is stronger at British institutions for being reserved. He began to loosen the cords of his own throne by over-subtlety of mind. He secretly felt fluctuations which were only likely to be quelled against the rock of Peter. As early as 1839 he contemplated the fifth century with alarming results. “I saw my face in that mirror, and I was a Monophysite !” This was more than could be borne.

Still it was hard to let himself be dragged from a vale of frankincense. He was willing to test every inlet and make trial of every tide. Anglican shallows he manœuvred like an eel. He tried to prove that the Thirty-nine Articles were not anti-Roman or, at least, not aimed at the Council of Trent for the simple reason that they had preceded the Council in time. They were directed against the same corruptions of good Roman doctrine, which the Council had sought to reform. Newman’s findings were issued in a famous Tract, which passed through the sluggish veins of the Establishment, like the kill-or-cure effected by mercury in the human arteries. A country

## SUBLIME FAILURES

clergyman wrote for “No. 90” to his bookseller, who answered that he had no knowledge of any tract entitled “No Go !” And in truth this was its real result. The wary and worried Establishment could stand a good deal from Newman, but this last effort was proclaimed “no go”, and of treasonable effect. Bishops charged, Heads protested, and Tutors fulminated. Newman withdrew to Littlemore in sorrow to write his *Essay on Development*, an essay with continuous consequences. By a flash beyond erudition he applied the theory of evolution to the history of the Church. There was a silence in the Oxford heavens. A third luminosity had appeared on Newman’s horizons, the Bishop of Rome !

Dollinger thought the *Essay* unsound in detail, but it carried further than any of Newman’s works. It justified after the parallel of an acorn and an oak-tree what seemed additions to the Creed and surreptitious grafts to Scripture. Like most efforts of genius, it proved a two-edged sword. Unitarians soon claimed his showing that the Trinity only became doctrine in the third century. But it also cleared a path to the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, which was defined ten years later. St. Bernard and St. Thomas Aquin had refused it in their day. All through medieval times it had been no more than a delicate rumour, a delicious hope that the Virgin, of whatever clay she was formed, had been born sinless, that the Vase holding the Christ-flower was flawless. And the theology of the nineteenth century

## CARDINAL NEWMAN

quarried the dogma out of the original deposit. Newman's theory allowed for new dogmas, but also made it possible to suggest that old dogmas might be held in new ways.

The *Essay* was Newman's Bridge of Sighs between the two Churches. The exact reasons for his transfer into the Catholic Church can probably never be known. He could not reproduce them in his *Apologia* twenty years later. Even at the time he refused them to a seeker : " You have not got them. You cannot get them except at the cost of some portion of the trouble I have been at myself. Moral proofs are grown into, not learnt by heart." There are always reasons which Reason does not know, and motives which the heart can feel but not utter. Perhaps he felt that the middle road had led into a blind alley. Perhaps he flinched from remaining with Keble and Pusey in an Anglican Trinity for the rest of his life. Perhaps he moved Romeward because others were moving or because others held back. Perhaps he was the eddy, perhaps only the largest leaf. But the great event occurred, often apologized for but never explained. The Queen Bee swarmed out of the Anglican hive followed by a thousand conversions. On arrival in the Papal gardens the Queen Bee was set to do the work of a drone.

Newman had picked his steps very successfully at Oxford. He had achieved fame, sensation and success. In Rome he was determined not to merge in the first religious Order that captured his fancy.

## SUBLIME FAILURES

It mattered not what founder's name it bore. He sought a Newmanite Order wherein he could keep and train his beloved disciples. The search for such an Order was prolonged and a little fussy. He was unwilling to lose his personality. The great Orders were impossible. He could not bear to be a Jesuit, as he said : " No one would know that I was speaking my own words." Again " is not the Dominican Order a great idea extinct ? " This was confirmed when he found the successors of Savonarola and Fra Angelico at Florence were " manufacturers of scented water and had very choice wine in their cellar ". On the other hand, it was hard on English gentlemen to begin their training afresh at the Propaganda, which then ruled the English Missions. Newman was disturbed to find that it entailed companionship with " a whole troop of blackamoors ". A lurid rumour reached the converts that they would have to wear second-hand shoes. " Why, one might catch the plague, for depend on it there are Egyptians and Turks there," he wrote in sudden alarm. In the end he decided for the Oratorians. Their Order had welcome alleviations : " It is like a College and hardly any rule." Existence was possible for Fellows of Oriel or Scholars of Trinity. Newman wished his Oratory to include " a good musician, a good lay brother, a good cook ". There was one doubtful severity in the rule. English gentlemen are only flogged in their school days. But in the Oratories of St. Philip Neri the process was indefinitely

## CARDINAL NEWMAN

continued. Newman's humour suggested putting Father Dalgairns and "our Irish John in front as the best floggers", while he himself retired and laid on gently behind a screen. He suggested adding "a regular good mimic, who would take off the great Exeter Hall guns": presumably imitations of the sanctimonious Lord Shaftesbury and the verbose of the day. According to Edward Coleridge, Newman was good enough mimic to have filled the part himself.

Rome delights in a converted heresiarch as once she delighted in the conquered kings who swelled a triumph. Newman was the petted synosure of a day and the Pope turned to other affairs. Newman would not have been human if he had not wished to reproduce his Anglican life in new guise, perhaps a glorified one. He felt like a wild flower brought into the protective warmth of a conservatory. An exotic bloom might be expected to develop from the rain-beaten forms. He dreamed a brilliant parallel of his Anglican career. He began by an issue of *Lives of the Saints*. The *Lives* he had issued from Oxford, whether they had been read as piety or fiction, had been very successful. But the Catholic series shocked the old-fashioned Catholics, who did not need the picturesque to stimulate their faith. They had absorbed the supernatural as simply as their greengrocery, and they did not want freakish fruit. They found that St. Rose of Lima had been treated idolatrously. Objections were also made to stories of cephalophorous saints like St. Winifred carrying

## SUBLIME FAILURES

her head. Newman was distressed, for with the curious touch of defiance in his character he went out of his way at different times to accept the Holy House of Loreto, the Blood of St. Januarius and the oil of St. Walburga. As a rule, Catholic thinkers do not allow themselves to be worried by such.

Great as was the rejoicing over Newman, he found plenty of rancour amongst old Catholics. They were "bursting with jealousy" and ungracious toward him. "They have pursued us with criticisms ever since we were Catholics," he complained. Like all critical spirits he did not enjoy criticism. Cardinal Wiseman promptly tested his reputed powers and pushed him into the arena. Unwisely and too truthfully Newman told the story of Doctor Achilli, who had been imported as a counterblast to the Oxford converts. Achilli was a barefooted Friar and also a barefaced seducer. Newman rent him to shreds, to find himself caught in a heart-wasting action for libel. Achilli proved invulnerable. Not even a tendon could be cut, when protected by a British Jury and Chief Justice. Wiseman left Newman to extricate himself from the enormous costs, which were defrayed by subscription. Achilli mistook the British attitude for licence and, after making play with some English housemaids, found his Apostolic uses at an end.

Wiseman's enthusiasm had been followed by convenient forgetfulness and he had left his convert in the lurch. Newman was not sorry when he was

## CARDINAL NEWMAN

offered a chance to exert his exquisite gifts in Ireland. But no alien has enjoyed a complete success in Ireland except St. Patrick. Newman arrived in Dublin to take service under a far more baffling Archbishop than Wiseman. Cardinal Cullen engaged him to supervise his new University as though he were engaging a cook. Religious Ireland had been in throes caused by "mixed education". The Synod of Thurles had declared against the scheme by a majority of one. But the deciding unit was the casting vote of Cullen, who was now forced to propose a scheme of his own. He proposed Newman. There was no tradition, no faculty of professors, no buildings and no funds except what could be milked from the faithful. Newman was placed at the head of this gesture. It was as though a Premier appointed a Field-Marshal before recruits had arrived or supplies been voted. Nor had officers been commissioned nor camps laid down. Newman complained that in England he had met courtesy without sympathy. In Ireland he was deprived of both. He had been invited to give a shred of reality to the phantom in Cullen's self-centred mind. He had not realized a tithe of the difficulty. In the first place half the Bishops had voted against the very theory which he had been invited to champion. In the second place the laity were luke-warm towards an Academy, in which their united vote could not equal Cardinal Cullen's will, and finally Archbishop MacHale disapproved of Cullen and all his works.

## SUBLIME FAILURES

Newman began by appointing English converts and Young Irelanders to the chairs. Cullen warmly disapproved of both. According to Mr. Ward, Cullen "seemed to dread freedom for science". Freedom for Ireland was another terror. The Young Irelanders were claiming what Mazzini claimed for Italy, while English graduates might encourage science. As a result Newman was engaged in "one long exhausting and fruitless effort". He made the mistake of asking for Wiseman as his Chancellor, Wiseman repaying the compliment with an illusionary Bishopric. Both ideas were horrifying to Cullen. The only value of the Reformation had been to keep English Bishops out of Ireland. Newman was always treated as a hireling and kept waiting in the passage by the Bishops. Cullen never answered his beautifully composed letters. As a climax he expected Newman to fight MacHale, whom Newman never dared to meet. Truly was a fine razor being used as a trowel.

Newman was compelled to beg and set out on his pathetic travels through the country. There were humorous as well as bewildering moments. Though he could not eat the "coarse and bleeding mutton" offered him by the clergy, the Bishop of Limerick banqueted him and during the hilarity of the feast appointed him Vicar-General, whereat the ordained and reverend company broke into rebel songs of Ninety-eight. It was magnificent, but it was an odd situation for an English gentleman. Never was he

## CARDINAL NEWMAN

further from his Oxford. Whately, who had once influenced him on the Isis, had become Protestant Archbishop on the Liffey. They found it better to cut each other from simulated pain or stimulated zeal. Moriarty of Kerry was the only Bishop who deigned to come to Newman's humble table, once sought by the flower of Oxford. The other Bishops considered that intellectual men were on the way to perdition. He was exhibited as a brand saved from the burning, not as a safe luminary. Without being armed with a crosier, Newman was powerless at single-stick with the Irish Bishops. Cullen proposed to keep the University priest-ridden while the Professors were "simply scrubs". Newman's idea that "nothing great or living can be done except when men are self-governed and independent", was inappropriate in the days of Pius the Ninth. Church policy is the slow unarriving pendulum between Liberty and Absolutism. In these years it was swinging towards Absolutism in Church and State. The Gallicans were doomed, did they know it. Newman, no Gallican himself, could find no followers save from their numbers. MacHale was a Gallican and they might have agreed on Irish studies, for which the English convert did more than all the native Bishops together by appointing Eugene O'Curry to the Irish chair. But Newman had been labelled Cullen's lamb, and he was not allowed to lie down with the Lion of St. Jarlath's. Between the two Archbishops he found himself poised as between hostility and

## SUBLIME FAILURES

mistrust. The mistrust was the less easy to endure and he gave up Cullen in despair. "An Archbishop without trust in anybody. I wonder he does not cook his own dinner"; said Newman aside. Mr. Ward wrote that "the cold unpromising uninspiring facts gradually chilled him by their dull pressure". He resigned and addressed letters to the Irish Bishops in an octave of descending politeness according to their personal kindness. MacHale was at the bottom of the list. There was a grim parting from Cullen, whatever words or silences that passed between. Newman rang the bell and the answering servant looked so frightened, "there must have been something unusual in our faces." What could Cullen say to the man, whose talents and enthusiasm he had invited and ignored, hired with specious promise and pushed into the narrow poke of his own policy. As a University it had turned to failure. Newman would have had a better chance had his Academy been proclaimed by the Government, and himself lodged in Kilmainham Jail. Thence he could have rallied Irish patriotism in support of his scheme. Thence he could have prevailed even against Cullen. Newman slipped away from Dublin, leaving his harsh employer with the credit. Though the University was only a skeleton, the bones were laden with undecaying fruits: the beautiful church on St. Stephen's Green, St. Cecilia's medical school, and the tocsin of Old Irish literature, while Newman's own volume, the *Idea of a University*, rose like

## CARDINAL NEWMAN

an ironical dream over the wastage of his Dublin years.

Yet somebody should say a word for Cullen. Condemned to the fear and dislike of both English and Irish, he has been shelved in oblivion. For twenty-five years he ruled in Ireland. Bishops were his nominees. Professors or politicians he treated as scrubs in the sanctuary, where he alone was high priest. Irish patriots could only hope that the Government felt his hand as heavily as they. He was of the stern unworldly type that sat in the Council of Trent. In the Vatican Council to come he showed theological greatness. He saved Pius from becoming the victim of the sheer Infallibilists. His attitude to Newman was that of a greengrocer, who uses a delicate and exotic orchid for window-dressing. Nobody in Ireland ever dared to contradict his policy when living and nobody has dared to write his biography dead.

Newman returned to England to find that Englishmen could be as difficult to get on with as Irishmen, even if they were Catholics, even if they were Oratorians. Newman broke with Father Faber, who was also a poet, also a mystic. Faber's verse had the Newmanite note, but sometimes it touched a pious hysterical, surpassing the tone of Italian devotion. With him the London Oratory favoured the extreme views. They had no use for Newman's reserved devotion to the Virgin, then as ever the stumbling-block of Anglo-Saxon minds. In his answer to Pusey, Newman tried to distinguish between

## SUBLIME FAILURES

a healthy and a feverish devotion to the Virgin. To Newman she was like King Cophetua's beggar-maid raised in her modesty to be a Queen. But for the Ultramontanes she was a Celestial Empress and mistress of the Universe. Newman was impatient "at the Roman practice as if those glorified creatures of God must be gravely shocked, if pain could be theirs, at the undue veneration of which they were the objects". Pusey collected some shocking instances which Newman shook aside as "a bad dream". But Mariolatry is exquisitely thin ice upon which to cut distinctions, once it is admitted that her fragrant but human body enclosed God. She ceases to be a part though participating in Creation. Who can set limits to poet or theologian before the tremendous paradox of one who is *Creatoris creatrix* or as Faber sang "within whose womb the Sceptre of Creation wrought". Newman was anxious to minimize her splendour for the sake of English ears and Protestant intelligences. Even so, his style was so beautiful that the passages in which he refers to the Virgin, make a crown of English wild flowers carrying her honour higher than any Continental exotics.

Over many points came the break with the London Oratory, which caused Newman much personal anguish. He carried his troubles to Rome with such emotional zeal that he walked barefoot from the stagecoach to St. Peter's. But Faber and those who thought with him were justified by the Holy See. Later Monsignor Talbot called upon Manning to

## CARDINAL NEWMAN

crush Newman as “ more English than the English ”. And Manning replied that Faber and Ward were a thousand times nearer to the mind of the Holy See than Newman and his “ worldly Catholicism ”. In Faber’s opinion Newman was on the shelf and had put himself there.

Newman was still a little hungry for success. He had the burning desire of a convert to justify himself. He had no suspicion how close the Church puts worldly failure to the theological virtues. Wiseman was willing to give him another trial and made a fascinating proposal to translate the Scriptures and challenge the sublimity of the Authorized. The Douay and Rheims Bibles were too quaint to be popular. The Catholic version creaked with the tuning forks of subsequent editors, while the English Bible rose like a forest of melodious organ pipes. Newman flung himself upon the task. He collected assistants and disbursed payments. A superb work appeared at hand : a boon to Catholics and a reply to Protestants. For himself it offered excuse for retirement and study, promise of unworried happiness and opportunity to shaft the arrows of the Lord with his literary plumes. Unfortunately American Bishops interfered on the ground that Archbishop Kenrick was preparing a version, which need have caused no fear of literary rivalry. Also there were said to be considerations amongst publishers, who held large stocks of previous versions. Wiseman felt disengaged, and left Newman to clear up the debris

## SUBLIME FAILURES

of an abandoned scheme. Whether Newman could have produced a version satisfying to Catholic readers and Protestant critics remains unanswerable. Although he was hurt in pocket, he may have been secretly relieved to be rid of so immense a prospect. His task was that of an architect invited to build a Gothic church under the shadow of Chartres Cathedral. It was hardly his to bend a bow, which had needed the united strength of the Jacobean Bishops to draw. He kept his arrows enquiered until a more suitable time.

Newman had learnt that the laity must not guide Universities. He now made the slip of proposing that they should be consulted in theology. The article appeared in the *Rambler*, a magazine in which Lord Acton maintained his life's struggle to combine passionate unity with the Roman See with a fanatical love of Liberty. It was delated to Propaganda, who found the English more difficult to understand than any heathen country. Propaganda was a source of stumbling blocks to the cultured converts. "What is Propaganda?" asked Newman. "Virtually one sharp man of business who works day and night and despatches his work quick off to the East and the West." England had been treated as a broken battle-front for centuries. When converts arrived, they were treated as prisoners on parole. They could hardly be offered staff positions. When Newman proffered a plan for turning the whole flank of modern Liberalism, he was hastily sent to the rear.

## CARDINAL NEWMAN

“ Propaganda does not understand an intellectual movement,” he commented sadly. “ It likes quick results, scalps from beaten foes by the hundred.”

Cardinal Barnabo, who would have made a good Colonial Secretary in a Tory Government, showed the impugned passages to Ullathorne, Newman’s Bishop, and remarked that they were not in Sanscrit. He added that the Pope was greatly pained. It was not revealed whether the Pope had read them or not, probably not. The dispensers of Papal anguish had turned Newman’s English into rough and ready Italian, and he asked : “ What did Propaganda know of the niceties of the English language ? ” Newman received due rebuke and wrote in terms of admirable submission to Wiseman, then languishing in Rome. Manning, who had become Wiseman’s mentor, saw the letter, and promised Newman an “ acceptable termination ” of his trouble. But Newman’s letter never reached Pope or Propaganda. Manning had not suppressed it as wickedly supposed, but he had mislaid and forgotten it in the hurry of more vital issues. Wiseman had discounted Newman as a trump card since the anabasis from Dublin, while Manning, who lived for the work of the moment, had not time to reflect whether Newman was worth clearing at Rome. He had no hostility toward Newman. He simply regarded him as dreamy and self-centred. In any case, Newman was the care of his Bishop Ullathorne, one of whose growing duties was to keep him out of hot water. Ullathorne duly condemned

## SUBLIME FAILURES

the *Rambler*, which had begun to criticize historical Popes, and extricated Newman. Manning wrote not unkindly of Newman's "sensitiveness about standing by friends even when in the wrong". He was inclined to pity him. He knew too well the jealousies and humiliations, which were apt to greet an able convert. He himself had trodden them down, but Newman seemed to succumb.

The wheel of time was bringing an admirable turn to the patience of both. Manning was made Archbishop, which made collision inevitable, but Newman, attacked by Kingsley as a liar, delivered the speech of the innocent from the dock. This time the popular jury came to his side. The *Apologia* was the Epistle of John Henry Newman to Romans and Anglicans alike. He made scintillating use of his obscure chance. Kingsley in his way was a parallel to Newman. He had used his fine pen to reconcile advanced schools of thought with the main Christian body. He had been called a Socialist much as Newman was dubbed a Garibaldian. Both were gifted free-lances, but unsuitable for the office of Bishops. Each had written lyrics of the first water, but as poets in the larger sense both had failed. They were born controversialists and controversy had dried their founts of poesy. Sharp was Kingsley's quill, but Newman's nib was of steel.

✓ Newman found himself accused of favouring a process of lying rather than "truth for its own sake". It was a hard saying, for he had given his

## CARDINAL NEWMAN

life to the reverent discovery of Truth. But he had given a new and sinister sense in English to the word “economy”. For Kingsley, to keep back a fraction of the truth was playing with falsehood. Newman and the moral theologians faced the fact that sparingness of the truth can be wise and even commendable. Not only is polite Society kept polite by such economies, but Newman found the Scriptures full of them. Elisha, as the Lord’s prophet, had wisely refrained from answering Naaman’s request for permission to bow to Rimmon. The text forbidding to cast pearls before swine was illustrated by the fact that Christ’s divinity was kept dark in early times. Kingsley’s reproach was one of those statements which are entangling to refute and impossible to prove, but Newman saw his opening and called for apologies as between gentlemen. Kingsley apologized as he might to a conjuror who objected to being called a confidence-trick man. Kingsley made downright and tactless truth the British fetish, a bludgeon to club time-servers, casuists and the like. He never dreamed that the rules laid down by “the blessed Saint Alfonso da Liguori” were as much practised in diplomacy as in private life. Protestants and Catholics will agree that truth raised to candour can be a menace to charity. And charity is ever greatest. In a difficult corner both Catholic and Protestant will lie heartily. The difference is that Protestants will excuse a lie by its success. Catholics will hunt up excuses in casuistry. Kingsley really believed

## SUBLIME FAILURES

that lying was a Catholic vice and truth-telling a Protestant virtue. In consequence he thought he had apologized handsomely, but Newman slipped his rapier between the lines and queried if he had not meant his word to be “the word of a professor of lying that he does not lie?” Kingsley had not said so, but he may have thought it. Newman did not sheathe, and Kingsley began to bludgeon. Then he dropped Kingsley as a terrier drops a rat. He had seen a gap through his own “chronic unpopularity”. Long-brooded and long-wished, the opportunity had come. He felt ready to unravel his whole life to the whole English-speaking world. The public were deeply interested in the public confessions of the most mysterious of their reticent race. Newman’s tears did not spoil his ink. In seven weeks he wrote a book of 500 pages. He wrote against the clock successfully. As a rule Time was with him, but not the clock, which was with Manning. With vibrant finger and febrile mind he wrote his soul to the uttermost. The famous tears he shed were not the tears of collapse. They were far, far too bitter. He was writing his answer to the two Churches which had misunderstood him. As he wrote to the Dean of St. Paul’s “the Roman Catholic party does not know me”. His memory swept like a gale through the dry leaves heaped upon the past. Many of the leaves were still aromatic. He did not whirl buffets at the Church of England, which he approved as “a body preaching dogmatic truth”. In an agony of

self-pity he remembered that he had loved and served her. He sketched his reluctance at being torn from her path and the death-pangs of departure. At one sweep of his wand he recalled his ancient power and once again addressed the wondering public he had lost. The arrows which he flighted under the shield of his *Apologia* were aimed at a body or faction preaching dogmatic exaggerations. It was easy to clear his Anglican life in the sight of Anglicans. The pith of his work lay in the final chapter entitled “The position of my mind since 1845?” Therein he cleared his Catholic career before Catholics. Manning and the Ultramontanes writhed.

The *Apologia*, though unread to-day, has been one of the famous books in English. It was written in prodigious haste. It was stuffed with letters and memoranda and fired as effectively as a rapid speech to the jury. It proved that rare prodigy in letters, a best-seller on the divinity shelf. It was full of torrid passages which have turned to dust with a little time, but out of the cracks and crannies there pushes many a lonely flower as haunting as the snap-dragons on the walls of Trinity, which he had once made the symbol of himself. He wrote at hysterical speed and the Muse of Grammar was often bruised on the way. But he was writing for that public, whose thought is hasty and whose English is untidy in expression. He enjoyed himself all down the line. He threw over St. Alphonsus for equivocation, but he quoted the acquiescence of no less than Milton and Jeremy

## SUBLIME FAILURES

Taylor in the practise of white lies. His sweet egotism was as clear to friends as foes. The book was a curiosity in self-dissection. It was on a different plane to the feminine revelations of Rousseau. It was not as virile as those of St. Augustine. Self in St. Augustine's Confessions does not taste stronger than the lime juice in a bowl of punch, whereas Newman squeezed himself like a lemon all the time. Newman tells of the tears that ran down his pen, but St. Augustine dropped a bloody sweat. The African was the more merciless to himself. Both recognized the clinging powers of friendship, but St. Augustine knew what Newman never did, the agonies of sex. It was the martyrdom of his flesh which made Augustine a Saint. Intellect was Newman's all in all, and of intellectual asceticism he was not capable. *Habent sua fata libelli* and book-writers have their reward. The fierce-curbed virility of Augustine made one of the eternal classics. His flexible Latin, beaten and tempered to the quality of steel, makes Newman's book seem old-maidish just as time has made it old-fashioned. The *Apologia* perhaps marked the ebb of the Reformation in the English mind. Henceforth the English attitude towards Catholicism was to think more and mind less.

It was interesting that the Ultramontanes disliked the *Apologia*. Manning thought it was a masterpiece of spiritual conceit. He remarked grimly that "it was like listening to the voice of one from the dead". He thought it would keep Anglicans where they were.

## CARDINAL NEWMAN

The future Cardinal Vaughan found the egotism “disgusting if venial”. Newman had an invincible way of imposing his wishes and preferences under gentle words. For instance, he thanked Pope Pius in that “giving us a Church of our own, he has prepared the way for our own habits of mind, our own manner of reasoning finding a place in the Catholic Church”. This was far from the Pope’s intentions, for the dominant school were labouring to bring Roman habits and reasoning into England. The Ultramontanes wished to descend the dogmatic depths in a diving bell of cast iron. The school of Newman demanded a possible means of return from inextricable positions.

The great success of the *Apologia* made Catholic organizers take notice. Newman’s naïve enemy, Monsignor Talbot, invited him to preach in Rome, and received one of the rudest replies in the English language. Newman’s excuse was that Talbot’s letter had been “an insolent letter suggested by Manning. The Pope had nothing to do with it. The Pope said : A very good thought, as he would have said if Monsignor Talbot had said I wish to bring your Holiness some English razors”. It was exactly what the tactless Talbot had proposed doing, only he cut himself rather badly while fingering the blade.

It was a pity that Newman lost his temper, for he arched the backs of Manning and Talbot, who could oppose his secret hopes of returning to Oxford. There alone he could recall his triumphs instead of

## SUBLIME FAILURES

languishing between Birmingham and Rome. Manning as Archbishop tried to be amicable, and for his pains received a letter to which reply was unsuitable. Newman confessed that when dealing with his Metropolitan he did not know whether he was standing on his feet or his head. Manning was left in a miserable puzzle. Ullathorne thought it best for him not to leave cards at the Oratory.

Manning lived with the object of keeping Catholics from the old Universities. And Newman knew. With difficulty he had been induced to attend Manning's consecration. When Manning had suggested a Bishopric, Newman decided that a mitre was as good as a muzzle. His comment on Manning's elevation was that "success is the goddess of an Englishman".

It is easy to stress Manning's stonewall opposition, but there were occasions when he went out of his way to stroke his old friend the right way. Unfortunately his touch left Newman feeling like cockled silk. Manning would not reverse his Oxford policy, but he suggested Newman going there alone without undergraduates: Hamlet without players. Barnabo thought that he was advising against his judgment and "out of regard to an old friend". An Oratory mission was bound to become a College. As long as Rome was told that Oxford was a hotbed of infidelity, Newman had to abandon the "rose-coloured landscape" he had traced for himself. Yet in Oxford of the 'sixties church bells rang as frequently

## CARDINAL NEWMAN

as in Rome herself. When answers were invited to the Oxford question from Rome, Newman was passed over. In vain had Ullathorne written a strong letter in dog Latin to Barnabo. Rome only smiles when a Bishop shows his hand. The Bishops and Propaganda acted on each other to snuff the question out. It would have been happier for Newman had he become a recluse, but the question was reopened when Ullathorne offered him the Oxford mission as parish. “Oh dear, oh dear; how I dread it!” sighed Newman, though it covered the desire of his soul. To return to Oxford he wrote “is like the dead coming to the dead”. His reappearance in the High would have been as dramatic as if a Prophet had been sent back to preach to the living. When Ullathorne insisted on Newman being consulted, he replied “the answer will be as fallacious as the question is ensnaring, unless I add my going will attract Catholics there”. Nevertheless, Newman, who always had financial backers, bought acres in Oxford. Rome was agitated from Westminster, and Cardinal Reisach paid a quiet visit to the site, but omitted to call on its owner. When Rome sent permission for an Oratory in Oxford, Ullathorne received word to dissuade Newman himself “blandly and suavely” from going. This time his friends were roused. The laity had no desire to be consulted in theology, but they wished some share in cricket and rowing at the Universities. A contemptible attack by a Roman journalist was the last straw. A sympathetic address to Newman was

## SUBLIME FAILURES

widely signed and presented, much to the anger of Manning and Talbot. It conveyed the sentiment that to touch Newman was to wound the Church. "But if Rome should touch him" sniffed Manning ominously. Newman despaired of being able to present his case to Propaganda. "What chance should I have with broken Italian (they don't, they can't talk Latin)." In the Italian mind "the laymind, Saxon, Teuton, French is barbaric, fierce and stupid, and is destined to be outwitted. Cardinal Barnabo has been trying his hand on my barbarism".

Newman struck the historic fact that the tone and cast of the Church since Trent had been Italian. The Northern sap had been cut off. English theology had been diverted into the voluminous beauty of Anglican divines. In comparison with the old Catholics, Manning, Ward, and Faber were garish and slavishly Italian. They joined the easy tide of Ultramontanism. Newman stayed knowing that it was not his hour. He looked upon Time as his vindicator. "The Latin race will not always have a monopoly of the *magisterium* of Catholicism. When the hour strikes, the reform will begin. Perhaps it has struck though we can't yet tell," he wrote like a Sibyl.

Cut off from Oxford, Newman devoted himself to one of the three vocations in which he said he could never be successful: schoolmastering, riding, and chess. He founded the Oratory School in a cramped suburb of Birmingham, but his name induced disciples

## CARDINAL NEWMAN

to send their sons. The great Newman was now playing with the details of a dominie and preparing Latin plays for schoolboys. No wonder that he became fidgety. At one moment he wondered whether he would die of paralysis. This gave him a queer comfort, for did not St. Anthanasius die of a paralytic seizure? He meditated further: "It would be a comfort to be associated with the great Saints in their illness. Pope St. Gregory had the gout. St. Basil had a liver complaint." And he fell back upon the music he once gave up that he might harmonize the souls of men. "Perhaps thought is music," he wrote, but he might have added not so dangerous. Rome had never censured anybody for their music good or bad. So while the walls of Rome were burning under the great Liberal attack, her most subtle defender was left to fiddle.

It was Newman's luck to be considered dangerous by whatever Church he adorned. Manning and Talbot had marked him down to be crushed chiefly because he was chilly toward the Temporal Power, which he dreaded being made a matter of Faith. Sensibly he favoured the Pope being reduced to a Post Office and a slice to the sea. He grimly imagined what Birmingham would be in the States of the Church and the young men with nothing to do but lounge the streets and throng the theatres. He was crushed but he did not mope. He let the Oratory knowing that his "monkey was up". As for "the three tailors of Tooley Street", as he designated Manning and

## SUBLIME FAILURES

Ward and Vaughan, "it was worth the suffering if we effectually oppose them." It was decided to make an appeal to Rome. Father Ambrose St. John, his beloved friend, was to let Barnabo know that "his precious instruction made me unwittingly collect money on false pretences. He co-operated in a fraud. Distil this blandly and suavely into his ears." The Oratorian embassy penetrated the famous burrows of Rome like ferrets. They reported to their beloved chief: "Nardi is a humbug: praises you and blames you according to his company. Father Smith is your most powerful enemy. Says everything you write is satirical." The classification of "Lead, kindly Light" under the heading of Satire seemed a new opening in literature. But perhaps Father Smith had less influence than supposed. Barnabo was the god in the machine, and His Eminence sat on the fence and contented himself with calling Ullathorne "poor fellow". Newman was indignant on hearing this. "The idea of a Diocesan Bishop having toiled as he has to be so treated." Ullathorne wrote himself that Newman had been "shamefully misrepresented at Rome". The Oratorians found that ecclesiasts were nervous of helping them. Cardella secretly supplied a lithograph of Cardinal Franzelin's strictures on the *Rambler* article, "nor did he want it known." Perrone proposed writing Newman's explanations for him. This was an admirable suggestion, as Propaganda were bound to send them to Perrone himself for judgment. Naturally "Perrone is very

## CARDINAL NEWMAN

anxious to keep it dark". Father St. John finally bearded Talbot for calling Newman a heretic. He pointed out that Baronius had used the same word as Newman, but of Baronius Talbot did not seem to have heard. Talbot suggested that as Newman "had ceased writing, why did he ever begin again?" They cornered him for spreading word that Newman had preached a sermon for Garibaldi. Talbot could only insist that he alleged no subscription. The appeal to Rome was successful and the Curia understood that Newman was not to be trifled with. In the end the two-faced Nardi visited Edgbaston and told Newman that Cullen was standing his friend. A powerful influence was moving secretly in his favour, but the Irish Cardinal remained inscrutable. Had gratitude or pity touched him under the Ultramontane mask? He must have remembered his faithful service in Dublin and noticing the murderous tittle-tattle which Englishmen were spreading in Rome, the Irishman was stirred to defend him. No doubt he vouched for Newman to the Pope, who invited the maligned one to share in the preparations for the Vatican Council in the following year.

One of the turning points in history was drawing near. But the iron had entered into Newman's soul and he flinched from the Ultramontane torrent. Confidence in his superiors could never blossom again. His plans had been frustrated and his counsels maligned. A Council always raises furious fray. Between contenders for different aspects of truth

## SUBLIME FAILURES

there is no quarter. Newman wrote that “a reign of terror has begun, a reign of denunciation, secret tribunals and moral assassination”. It was hardly as bad as that, for he found himself free to hit back.

Newman’s part in the Council was in opposition. Infallibility preyed on his nerves not on his faith. The Infallibilists made him furious. The whole ecclesiastical pond was stirred. Much historical dust was muddified but the great Dogma emerged like a lotus-flower at the end. The Opposition never denied that it was in the deposit of faith, but they felt it was wiser and certainly safer to leave it there. But they were ridiculed and ridden down by the boisterous Ultramontanes. There was a Majority which merely followed the majestic swing of the pendulum. Newman found himself between their noisy camp-followers and those who dreaded the Dogma. He regretted its Definition, but God alone knew whether it was inopportune. “And what can one writer do to counteract this misfortune?” he wrote.

He was afraid that the Dogma would confer infallibility upon the famous Syllabus, which frankly repudiated modern science. Writers like Ward insisted that the Syllabus was spoken *ex-cathedra* from the bridge, whereas Newman took it for an utterance from the helm. Manning wished to bring Doctrinal Decrees under the Infallibility and Ward ludicrously desired a new Dogma at breakfast every morning. Newman, who looked as far ahead as he

## CARDINAL NEWMAN

had studied pastward, perceived the difference between Decrees and Dogmas as between meteors and comets. The theologians had to decide what was as rare and eternal as a comet and what was the flash of temporary illumination. Newman was not carried away by the noisy Deifiers of the Pope, but he prepared himself philosophically for what was coming. He wrote the delicate but difficult *Grammar of Assent*. It was a book that the author must have felt would puzzle Manning. To that master of certitude Newman's assents must have seemed but disguised dissent. In his *Apologia* Newman said that "ten thousand difficulties do not make a doubt". In the *Grammar of Assent* he implied that ten thousand probabilities make a certitude. He saw that the Infallibility was certainly based on probabilities. He took it out of the sphere of logic. He tried to trace men's arrival at beliefs by an illative sense. The conclusions of theologians could be accepted like geographers' maps. The search for Infallibility need not involve an infallible seeker. So not unprotected Newman wrapped himself in philosophy and awaited events.

There were sixty formulas of Infallibility and the Council must select the least vulnerable and most comprehensive. But not before a fearful struggle. Some wanted none, and many wanted an expression that was extreme. Newman was dismayed by the speed of the Council. "You are going too fast," he cried. He compared it to "a railway engine running over some unhappy workman on the line".

## SUBLIME FAILURES

At one time Manning appeared to be deliberately stoking the engine. It was curious that the practical Manning took an apocalyptic view of the Dogma, while the mystical Newman was nervous of its effects. His nerve was not sufficient to play the part of a lone priest like Malchion at the Council of Antioch or of Salmeron at Trent. From afar he was fingering a barbed arrow, and he found Bishop Clifford to hold his quiver. In lonely despair he wrote a petulant but beautifully weighed letter to Ullathorne asking "why should an aggressive insolent faction be allowed to make the heart of the just to mourn". Ullathorne showed the letter which was not marked private to four Bishops, whom he considered in the ranks of the wise. Two more English Bishops added their approval when the letter was published in the *Standard*! The leakage was never explained. Clifford assured Ullathorne that "no one could have seen or taken a copy of his copy". Nevertheless, Ullathorne found a lady showing it round Rome and Newman read it in the *Standard*! He wrote to Alfred Austin, the Roman correspondent of the *Standard*, leaving the responsibility on "those who withdrew" the letter from Ullathorne, adding "I do not feel myself personally injured by the circulation of one of the most confidential letters I ever wrote". On the contrary. A ripple passed through the Council, and the Opposition were secretly pleased by the bitterness of their ally. At that moment no event could have seemed more unlikely than Newman's

## CARDINAL NEWMAN

elevation to the Cardinalate, unless it were Mr. Austin's succession as Poet Laureate.

Having delivered his shaft, Newman prayed to St. Augustine to avert the Infallibility. He hoped that the divine will would postpone the divine triumph. Torments he suffered in his Odyssean mind. At Rome the tide ran steady. As soon as the Infallibilists had conquest in sight, the mighty undercurrent of compromise was felt. The Gallican Bishops (French, Irish, English, German, and American) could not be made to eat their mitres. Logic and reason sat remorselessly over the enthusiasts. Newman had word of Cardinal Cullen saying that the Pope could never use the Dogma as threatened. When the hour came, it was the Irish Cardinal who intervened. Ultramontane himself, he was able to make suggestions to the sensitive Pope and the sensible theologians. It became a question of making husbandry of words and even imperceptible minimizing. The Gallicans had failed to reduce the Dogma to pulp. The Ultramontanes could not be allowed to make it cast iron. Cullen was equal to stretching a tight-rope between the two. The Dogma was finally defined in terms of the older-fashioned Ultramontanes, and the "aggressive insolent faction" were undermined. However loud the victory that Manning proclaimed, Newman wrote relieved: "I have ever believed as much as the definition says. The Pope is infallible in his pronouncements *ex-cathedra* not in his state of illumination which would

## SUBLIME FAILURES

be inspiration." The Council afforded a spectacular triumph to one side but a moral victory to the other. To the ironical it seemed as though the Pope had said : Only believe me infallible and I will never test you ! Like the Royal Veto in the British Constitution, Infallibility lay embalmed but never embarked upon.

The aftermath of the Council brought Newman into play, for he had to answer Gladstone's wordy diatribe against "the myrmidons of the Apostolic Chamber". If Manning's attack had been strong, Newman afforded admirable defence against the common enemy. Compared to a tennis player, Manning exulted in full volleys. Newman might seem a gentle player, but by the end of the game he had generally involved his opponent in the net itself. Manning, like a bulldog, wished to crush heresy at a mouthful, whereas Newman enjoyed playing a little tenderly with the mouse.

Gladstone was carried away to write of the Vatican as though it were a Bulgarian horror. He dressed up the Pope as a cockshy in the Ultramontane colours favoured by Manning and Ward, and proceeded to assault his garish target at leisure. Newman saw a subtle chance of discounting the extremists. "We can speak against Gladstone while it would not be decent to speak against Manning." In his answer, the celebrated *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*, he spoke both ways. The answer attracted the same rapt attention as the *Apologia*. Sensitive Ultramontanes

## CARDINAL NEWMAN

felt that he had arrowed them slyly and appealed to Rome for censure. He had written about the moral malaria at the foot of the rock of Peter. He had not been respectful about the Popes who had lost England. The old intrigues recommenced in Rome, but this time it was Manning who cleared Newman. Serene in his victory at the Council, he could afford to be generous. His own unpopularity in England harmed the Catholic cause, and he shrewdly sensed Newman's uncanny influence on the British mind. A swift and secret rescript passed from Westminster to Rome warning the Holy See not to disturb Newman. He was powerless to influence the elect, while outside the Church his writings could only do good. But of this Newman heard nothing. He had lost his beloved Father St. John. He had burnt his letters from Manning and abandoned himself to a serenity of sorrow. Again he appealed to Time to justify him. "I must be patient for Time is on my side. But the Pope has superseded Time," he wrote sadly. Time was now to supersede the Pope.

A new Pope ascended the vice-throne of God, a scholar and diplomatist, all that Pius had not been. Even in the Church patience brings the wheel full circle. Newman had prophesied there would come "a stern Nemesis for imperious acts such as now afflict us". Manning had received his hard-won hat from the moribund hands of Pius. He belonged definitely to the last creation, but Newman became one of the glories of the new. His Cardinalate was the strangest

## SUBLIME FAILURES

trick time played on Manning. The English laity, whom Newman had championed so long, saw their chance. Norfolk and Ripon invited Manning to write their request to Rome. A look swept Manning's countenance as though he were reversing the policy of a lifetime. The letter was unduly delayed, but eventually Newman received the consoling offer. "It has all come too late," he said truly. He sent his acceptance to Manning with qualifications about residing in Rome which Manning gladly mistook for a refusal. His will power still refused to believe that Newman could be made a Cardinal. To him Doctor Newman was still a half-hearted, half-heretical minimizer. He forwarded Newman's letter to Rome, but he sent a refusal on behalf of Newman to the Press! Both acted in accordance with their characters.

Rome was gracious, and Newman was excused translation from Birmingham in his old age. He was only asked to undertake a visit of ceremony and bathe in the glowing felicitations of the Holy City. The exquisite Pope placed the Red Hat on his head, whether as an aureole or an extinguisher. Alas that Cardinals Barnabo and Cullen were not there to see ! It was a bitter afternoon for Manning. The Pope did not touch thin ice in conversation. "He said had we any lay brothers ? How then did we do for a cook ? I said we had a widow woman and the kitchen was cut off from the house. He said *bene* !" The subject of converse between so great

## CARDINAL NEWMAN

a Pope and so great an Englishman apparently concerned a Birmingham charwoman. Newman returned and was at peace.

It is curious to think who were housed in Birmingham in that decade—Newman, Ullathorne, Chamberlain, and the author of *John Inglesant*. Newman fell back in acquiescence of his career which was now over. His plans and enterprises had been thwarted. His pen had won him the laurels of literature. Even the Dead Sea apples of controversy had become gilded under his hand. He had no illusions, for he looked back and wrote: “For years beyond numbering I have been crying out. I have laboured in vain; I have spent my strength without cause and in vain . . . it is the rule of God’s providence that we should succeed by failure.” His apprenticeship had been a long one. And the Cardinalate was like the red glow at sunset after a wet and stormy day. All careers are ground between the two millstones of circumstances and character. Had Newman’s been that of a thwarted and tear-ridden old maid, he would have succumbed to the long and bitter sequence of event. Times had been long unpropitious, but he had been justified almost on the last throw. It hardly made up for the waste of his Catholic life. The smile which once lit his face at Oxford passed into an expression of cautious resentment. But with the Cardinalate—

“ those angel faces smile,  
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.”

## SUBLIME FAILURES

“ Lead, kindly Light ” was too personal to become a hymn in the Catholic liturgy, and for the same reason the *Apologia* could never become a book of devotion. He was the luminous centre of his own works. Convinced of his unique personality, he accepted the idolatry of his friends and resented backsliders and backbiters unforgivingly. Manning attributed his failure in life to his temper and went so far as to call him a good hater. As far as this was true it only showed the stiffer strands in him. Though it is often tempting to invest him with feminine attributes, it was only the man in him that could during all those years have resisted equally the sword of success and the darts of intrigue. Manning had swept all before him, but the tide turned in the new pontificate. In a sense Manning was like Lady Macbeth in clearing the path, while Newman was left to play Hamlet at Edgbaston.

Time rapidly declared itself in Newman’s favour. *Deus viderit*—God shall see to it ! was inscribed on his pennon. Manning kept his prestige but not his power at Rome. He was realizing that he would have to make revision on points he had thought vital. At one time he had believed that the gates of Hell could not prevail against the Temporal Power. He lived to suggest that Providence had opened the gates of Rome as a needed correction. He discovered that Papal morality laid down in politics could be imprudent. He instanced two cases on which Englishmen might feel sensitive : “ The Popes were morally

## CARDINAL NEWMAN

within their right in the approval of the Armada and the condemnation of the Plan of Campaign," imprudences resented by the English Catholics under Elizabeth and by Irish Catholics under Queen Victoria. In each case the Holy See had shown irritation. The Pope had withheld a Red Hat from Edward Farnese because the Armada failed and from Archbishop Walsh because the Plan of Campaign was a comparative success.

On one point Manning declined to swerve, though Time left him down an impasse from which, indeed, he made no further sign. Though the Oxford scheme of Newman collapsed, the University question remained. Manning like Cullen before was bound to offer some counter-attraction to the laity. This he staged at great cost by founding a College in Kensington. Instead of a Newman at Oxford Catholics were invited to place their sons under Monsignor Capel, a flashy priest of Vanity Fair. By a singular irony Capel fell to the moral danger which Propaganda supposed to await young men at Oxford. A rumour of illicit entertainments had reached Manning and in a twinkling of an eye Capel was banished to California. Manning bore immerited odium for an act which was deeply resented by Capel's friends. When Rome moved to restore Capel, Manning had a trump card, the letter of a dame whom Capel had deserted for another. The mistake of not sending Newman to Oxford had been punished by the two terrors of the ecclesiastical mind : bankruptcy and scandal.

## SUBLIME FAILURES

When Newman returned to the scene of his magical preaching, where the cultured youth of England had yearned towards him, it was as a Cardinal and a guest at his old College of Trinity. His controversies were over in the way all controversies end. His College made him an honorary Fellow, and he performed the delicate sleight of hand of dedicating to his Protestant Fellows a reprint of the famous *Essay* which had caused his original departure. *Deus viderit*, God had seen him through.

Looking back through the stultified 'fifties and dolorous 'sixties of Newman's life, it is easy to notice passages out of which Mr. Ward could construct his ecclesiastical Mrs. Gummidge. Lord Acton described his collapse when an article by Dollinger in the *Rambler* had been denounced. "He was quite miserable when I told him the news and moaned for a long time, rocking himself backwards and forwards over the fire like an old woman with the toothache." In 1860 he was writing: "I have no friend at Rome. I have laboured in England to be misrepresented, backbitten, and scorned. I have laboured in Ireland with a door ever shut in my face." Two years later he ceased to write altogether, "because Garibaldi's chaplains-in-ordinary never do write." In 1864 he wrote "I accept it as a token that I am still feared because I am still abused". He was atrociously sensitive and counted his miseries. "I might almost say that a pleasant event has not happened to me for more years than I can count."

## CARDINAL NEWMAN

Apart from the adoration of his Oratorians, he had a human love of praise: "I think I never have been praised for anything I did except once." Newman was difficult to help. Cullen and Manning helped him at times without letting their right hand know. Wiseman wished to help, but he had his own troubles, and Newman found him "personally unkind by word and deed". There was a superficial Newman, a finicky and tear-dripping character, who predominates in his Biography, but there was a soul of steel that was never so strong, never so unbending as under delay and disappointment and disaster. Behind his cloak of fussiness flickered the keenest rapier that any man of letters bore in his time.

Newman's strength appears in the consistency of his character. He never changed his attitude to friend or foe. Superiors throughout his life verged to the side of foe, and he troubled them sore. To take a swift glance backwards, as far back as Oxford he troubled and enjoyed troubling his Bishop who was kindness itself to his wayward child. But let him repeat a little gossip and Newman had cornered him: "I was not going to let the Bishop off on this evasion." Another recollection in the *Apologia* runs: "I was indignant at the line he was taking (the Bishop of London), and from my steamer sent home a letter declining the appointment by anticipation. At this time I was especially annoyed with Dr. Arnold." These straws show his mind thirty

## SUBLIME FAILURES

years later. Querulous he could be, a little spiteful, and certainly unforgetting with the years. A flash reveals his character in the 'thirties : " My behaviour had a mixture in it both of fierceness and of sport." It was the same mixture which spiced the *Apologia* in the 'sixties. Then as before he enjoyed stirring the wonder or anger of dull and self-conceited men. The same type rouses the scorn of the artist in bourgeois life and Newman was an artist to his finger-tips. His Oxford Curate, Williams, found him " in the habit of looking for effect ". The artist in him deprecated Catholic preaching, " the utter want of taste. Theology as mathematics and metaphysics does not give taste." He found it hard to yield to dull authority. Over Tract Ninety he confessed " I was obstinate ", and he continued obstinate into Catholic days. He was not a bonny fighter, but he never gave up. *Deus viderit !*

Few could suspect the grim opponent and deep contender who underlay the fidgety weaver of words and complaints. Many tears are recorded in his life. He wept at Littlemore. He wept at Edgbaston. He wept when he wrote the *Essay on Development*. He wept when he wrote the *Apologia*. Many times he must have eaten the bread of sadness in secret and watered with grief his Oratorian pillow. But they were never the tears of weakness. They were the emotional clearing of his brain. They procured him the result that the coarser-grained obtain with snuff.

Newman's real weakness lay in dependence upon

## CARDINAL NEWMAN

friends. It was the weakness of the prophet who craves a school and the artist who rests his nerves upon disciples. Manning had learnt to work without friends. Newman was proclaimed to the world by his friends. Manning was his own advertisement. He broke with the Jesuits, for diocesan not personal reasons. It was owing to personality that the London Oratory swerved from Newman, who divided the Oratorians, and, indeed, Saints into categories that were Newmanite or not. Philip Neri was a favourite, but Liguori was not. "I follow other guidance in preference to his." But whimsies were only the velvet which covered the fearless feline beneath. There was a claw which Manning, Talbot, and Kingsley experienced in turn.

Manning was the excelling High Priest, but Newman was of the prophetic order. Religious history has largely been a conflict between those two orders. Newman appeared for the rising and falling of many. What think ye of this man? was once Oxford's query. Men like Froude and Mark Pattison followed him awhile and turned aside bitterly. In later years when Pattison was Master of Lincoln and Newman a Cardinal, he made an effort to recover his lamb, but it was like trying to crook a moribund sheep. Others preceded or followed him to Rome. For a short time the flower of an English University considered the Papal claims. Propaganda treated them as though they were converts from the swamps of Uganda. The bulk of those who followed

## SUBLIME FAILURES

Newman settled into Religious Orders or drifted. In any case, they disappeared. Their influence on the Catholic Church of the day was as nugatory as that of their leader. His influence stayed in the Church he had left. Under his wand the whole Church of England, which had been comfortably stagnant, rose nervously from the dead. Not until after his death did his writing percolate the Universal Church. The Modernist movement was not the reflection, but it was certainly the shadow of his mind.

As *The Times* wrote : “He died full of honour but not of honours.” He remains a permanently interesting figure in the religion of the nineteenth century. In spite of his misfortunes and failures in the past, in spite of Modernists in the present, his light is a growing light, whereas all the luminaries of his time have become quenched fires. Great prelates like Cullen and Manning are now judged by their treatment of Newman. Ullathorne might have compared Newman’s importance in his diocese to that of the growing cuckoo in the nest of a chaffinch.

Ullathorne never regretted that his Bishopric had been largely absorbed in Newman’s affairs. Receiving a last visit from Manning, he suddenly loosed his long-pent indignation against the intrigues, which had wrecked Newman’s Catholic life. Nor did he spare Manning’s petty opposition to Newman’s Cardinalate. Manning thereupon scolded Ullathorne like a schoolboy, telling him he had been

## CARDINAL NEWMAN

no match for Newman and his subtleties. Ullathorne replied that Manning had been worsted by Newman himself. On these home truths they parted.

In the ecclesiastical background Newman played the part which the French assign to the *femme fatale*. He fascinated, influenced, and changed men's lives. He was often inexplicable save on temperamental grounds. Though threatened and thwarted until he and his believed in his failure, he preserved an infrangible soul.

Newman had supplied an element of fate to many lives indeed. It was symbolic that Father Dalgairns should have once recognized Newman's stern and melancholy features in the statue of Fate in the Vatican Gallery. The same features are discernible in the statue which was refused by Oxford, but which now peers so pathetically at the traffic passing Brompton Road.



CHARLES STEWART PARNELL  
1846-1891





## CHARLES STEWART PARNELL

THE outlines of Parnell's career are sufficiently known in history, and legend has gathered certain stark threads of his character. O'Connell had died old, and Young Ireland had died young in the 'forties. From behind the misty Wicklow hills appeared the man of destiny, whom Ireland had been awaiting for a quarter of a century, and whom she has regretted ever since. His rule as an uncrowned king corresponded to a Judge in Israel, and lasted ten years. In a country partly primitive and partly epical like Ireland, there is a running parallel between her political and religious leaders and the Judges and Prophets, who with the arm of flesh or the spiritual club accomplished the path of the chosen people. In the late nineteenth century Ireland was chosen for experiment by the Destiny of democracy. The circumstances, which bred Parnell to be the chief ingredient in the experiment, were unusual: feudal birth in the ranks of the landlords, Cambridge education, random tastes for cricket and metallurgy, at bedrock an aristocratic heart and poor power of speech in public: but Destiny chooses her tools for reasons which Reason herself cannot always give.

His powers were adapted strangely and effectually. His political career was a success in the way that

## SUBLIME FAILURES

lightning is a success. He caused an agricultural earthquake in Ireland, while his sudden fall blew little less than a hurricane through the statecraft of England. He achieved heights lonely enough to bring about a fall like that of Lucifer, who for pride's sake fell through Milton's Epic for nine days. Parnell's fall occupied Ireland for nine months. But his main achievement no one could have achieved but he, and none can take away his glory. He lifted the Irish from serfdom as surely as the Czar Alexander freed the Russian peasant. The adoration of a nation and love for a woman led to the darkened tragedy which buried the hopes of Ireland for a generation. Few Irish leaders have enjoyed a position more hero-like, more uneasy, and more sinister than that of Parnell, and none have encountered so disastrous a morass at the end. When he passed into the shadows, there fell a curtain whose sordidness promised that oblivion would be active as well as passive toward his memory. But strangely, the very passion and love-passages, which brought about his doom and disgrace, have been the chief means of keeping his name alive amongst a generation of the world's readers, which knew him neither as a statesman nor as the baffling leader and pirate freelance of British politics. His end has emerged as pitiful as an ending in Greek Tragedy : his love as wild and baleful as that of Tristram for Iseult. Failure can only be connoted of his politics because he failed to achieve what was once in the hollow of his hand. He achieved his love at dire cost,

## CHARLES STEWART PARNELL

and in the temple of fame he stands amongst the great lovers not criminals like Casanova and King David, but with Paris and Abelard and Lord Nelson, the great romantics. His paramour was destined to be no less fatal to Ireland than Helen was to Greece and to survive her lord in the same misery and obscurity which befell Lady Hamilton. The interest has gathered rather than slackened with the years.

The literary tribute is already considerable. Barry O'Brien provided a pleasant and judicious Biography omitting the fiercer undercurrents in which Parnell lived and remembering that Mrs. Parnell was still alive. Memoirs came from his elder brother, John Howard Parnell, brotherly, and from his sister, Emily Dickinson, insanely scandalous where it touched his Cambridge life. Personal appreciations have come from William O'Brien and Sir Alfred Robbins. Justin McCarthy's appreciation appeared in various memoirs, while Frank Hugh O'Donnell sketched a grotesque but sometimes brilliant caricature in his *History of the Irish Parliamentary Party*. T. P. O'Connor made him into good journalistic copy and Tim Healy filled his *Memoirs* with valuable but prejudiced material. There has been the blunt Ulster criticism of St. John Irvine, and finally *The Lifting of the Veil* by the faithful Henry Harrison. Strange and ironical fate for one so secret and reticent, his wife, Mrs. O'Shea, published fragments of his pathetic love in a setting that veered to the viewpoint of the O'Shea family. She seemed to write like the

## SUBLIME FAILURES

woman in the Middle Ages, whose husband tortured her until she ate her lover's bleeding heart.

Parnell was born at Avondale in 1846. His mother came of revolutionary American stock, his father of the patriot aristocracy of Ireland, who held their Parliament until it was filched from them. The restoration of this Parliament was Parnell's supreme object, by which his failure or success has to be estimated. The mixed breeding produced a proud and handsome stock with a touch of eccentric enough to be thought insanity. But there are few old Irish families without a slightly mad appearance by English standards. The famine had hushed Ireland and the Parnells lived in the feudal atmosphere of the eighteenth century. Beyond Avondale lay the mountains and beyond the mountains demesne after demesne grew greater and wider towards the West. Between the demesnes were herded the Irish people busily engaged in paying rent.

Avondale was a Georgian mansion, set amid huge silver firs, bleakly proportioned, and decorated within by the spectral horns of the extinct Irish elk, flags of the Irish Volunteers, a billiard table, and texts from Scripture. For all their sport and Leveresque manners the Irish gentry were liable to spasms of pious enthusiasm. The ablest of Parnell's uncles, Sir Henry Parnell, had committed suicide, but another devoted a less useful life to Scriptural research and missionary journeys to Bagdad.

Parnell's father was one of a hundred athletic

## CHARLES STEWART PARNELL

unimaginative gentry, who enjoyed the Ireland which was offered to them during the prolonged lull before the storm. He was fond of cricket, and died as the result of playing with a chill. On his mother's side Parnell was grandson of an American Commodore, who ate British frigates for breakfast. Incidents of his childhood were recalled and perhaps coloured in the subsequent event. He used in playing soldiers with his sisters to gum his army to the floor. He played "Follow my leader" on condition that he was leader. His nurse, Mrs. Twopenny, was remembered to have laid down that "Master Charley is born to rule". Avondale was a paradise for children. Time drifted past in a rush of greyhounds and cricket balls. There were ponds to be scooped in the hill and particles of real gold to be washed out of the river. At twelve Parnell was taken to his father's funeral and conceived a lasting aversion to such mixtures of realism and hypocrisy. When his grandmother died suddenly, there is a story that he and his brother wished to revive her with a galvanic battery. He was certainly unreligious from the start. He was sent to a tutor's in England where he played cricket with the future founder of Empire Day, Lord Meath. He passed to Magdalene College, Cambridge, where he continued his gentlemanly interest in cricket and mathematics. His cricket improved, and he afterwards captained the Wicklow Eleven. On one occasion his influence was strong enough to induce his team to leave the field after an altercation with a Dublin

## SUBLIME FAILURES

Eleven. Academically his career was a blank. He read Paley's *Christian Evidences*, and found them as others have found them, "insulting to God and tedious to man." They destroyed his last faith in revealed religion, but as a gentleman he made no parade of his sentiments. He became a member of his Church Synod in the same way that he became Sheriff of Wicklow. His time at Cambridge was ended by a street row, for which he was mulcted in court. Having no need of a University Degree to practise as a country gentleman, he did not return.

The Avondale estate had come into possession of the Parnells through marriage, and was always passed to the younger son, who in this generation was Charles. The brothers went to America. They were interested in fruit-farming and mining. Parnell's good looks made him a favourite partner in the dance, but he could not persuade a beautiful Miss Woods to marry him. In 1871 he prepared Avondale for her coming, but she refused him as an unknown and penniless squire. In later years he once said that he took to Irish politics because he was jilted. The brothers settled down at Avondale. Their family history dawned upon them gradually. Old Sir John Parnell had refused a Peerage rather than vote for the Union, and his descendant believed he had succoured fugitive rebels of 'ninety-eight. All the talk in Ireland was of the Fenians, though they were scattered or in gaol. These extraordinary men had had a curious effect on

## CHARLES STEWART PARNELL

Gladstone. They blew up an English prison, so he disestablished an Irish Church. Parnell's mother sympathized with them fiercely. Her Dublin house was searched and with true official clairvoyance Parnell's Militia uniform was confiscated in mistake for a rebel outfit. In order to attend the next levee it was necessary for him to request the Castle to return him the uniform of the Queen.

The Fenians continued to fill family discussions. The Home Rule Party under Isaac Butt were doing their best to obtain the release of prisoners, reckless idealists under savage sentences. When John Parnell suggested his brother should join Butt, Charles felt he could not "join that set". But he considered the matter and one night at dinner in 1874 he suddenly remarked that the elections made a grand opening to enter Parliament. With his brother-in-law, Dickinson, he set out at midnight and returned two hours later with the knowledge that a Sheriff was not eligible to stand. The Viceroy would not accept his resignation so he made his reluctant brother stand for Wicklow. Parnell wrote the address and paid the bill. As Sheriff he had the duty of announcing the family name at the bottom of the poll. In the same year Parnell was defeated for Dublin, but returned for Meath in the next. Failure in public speech made him an unlikely candidate, but sheer personal charm won the Catholic Bishop and his career had begun.

Tides ran thickly in the 'seventies. Political ooze lay heavy on the land. The Pope's Brass Band had

## SUBLIME FAILURES

played themselves hoarse. The National Party was stuffed with Whigs. Some of the best Home Rulers were Tories. Home Rule itself had been born a bantling of the Protestant camp, and Isaac Butt was its midwife. It was sponsored by some of the lingering heirs of Grattan and Charlemont, who were gentlemen first and Irishmen after. Home Rule was brought before the House like a forlorn hope before a debating society. Irish members were so used to being laughed at that they would not have taken themselves seriously except as subjects for merriment. Butt addressed the House with a lawyer's reverence for a jury, to be soothed, interested, and placated. He submitted to the Speaker as though he were Coke rolled upon Blackstone in one. He overlooked the fact that the House overlooked him. His ruder followers were treated as undesirable curiosities or comic bores. Principal amongst them was Joseph Biggar, whom Disraeli with a phantom leer pronounced to be a leprecaun.

Biggar was introducing methods, which removed the gloss of Imperialism, which Disraeli had shed like a mantle upon the Mother of Parliaments. Under his pork-butcher's jacket Biggar nursed a heroic soul. His impression on Parnell bred history. Parnell reached the House in time to hear him make a four-hour speech, or rather endeavour to prevent any English member making a speech for four hours. Parnell became a salient but silent member. He took the Irish congratulations to America on the Centenary

## CHARLES STEWART PARNELL

of the United States. President Grant, whom Parnell thought “a vulgar old dog”, refused to receive them except through the British Embassy. Parnell based his parliamentary tactics on Grant’s strategy. Washington, he said, would have been a very unpopular leader in Ireland.

He began to pay a strained but sinister attention to the methods of the House. Procedure was as careful and strict as the rules of cricket, and Parnell decided on a policy of stonewalling. No umpire in the person of a Speaker could forbid him. Except for a burst, in which he declared his sympathy with the Fenians who were executed at Manchester, he was strictly constitutional. At the O’Connell Centenary there was a Fenian car, which was jostled by those who were trying to keep the procession respectable. When the traces were cut, Parnell and his friends dragged the car round with full honours. He was still slow to move and wary of speech. When he returned from one of his tours in America he declared for an Irish National Militia “to protect the interests of Ireland as a Nation, while they would never do harm or wish to trespass upon the integrity of the English Empire”. His wise and constitutional statements were obscured by extreme followers or ignored by extreme enemies. Opposed by English contempt, he studied the arts of obstruction. Butt’s policy was to secure days of debate for Ireland. Parnell preferred to spoil days for England. With a handful he kept the House sitting from four in the afternoon until seven next

## SUBLIME FAILURES

morning (2nd July, 1877). Butt was brought in to quell his subordinates. It was a wonderful chance for Butt to bless instead of curse, but he missed it, and reproved Parnell to the tumultuous pleasure of the House. From that moment Parnell was a marked figure. Stafford Northcote tried to catch him making profession to thwart the business of the House. By the time the Speaker had been sent for and his words taken down, it was discovered that he only wished to thwart the intentions of the Government. The debate was abandoned and Parnell resumed his seat. A few days later he held up the House for twenty-six hours, reserves arriving with the Irish mail. It was obvious that Parnell had broken the backbone of Parliament unless rules of closure could be introduced. Government could only be carried on by physical endurance.

Parnell never joined the Fenians, but he liked to keep them guessing his plans. He headed the ovation which met some of the released prisoners. He invited them to breakfast at his hotel in Dublin, and was confirmed in his feelings when one of them expired on the spot.

Inevitably there was a conflict of views. The young men were critical of Butt as a warm-hearted dispenser of rhetorical blubber and oil, and it became a conflict between whale and killer-whales. Butt could only fend them with a few flips of his tail. Parnell was unwilling to harry the old man, remarking that he was young and could afford to wait. Meantime, the

## CHARLES STEWART PARNELL

Fenians were turning towards him, and they cabled their plan from America to Parnell, who never answered. A weaker leader would have replied fulsomely and eventually failed them. But Parnell wished to have both Church and Fenians behind him, as though Garibaldi had tried to unite Pope and Carbonari to achieve Italian unity. In Ireland it was not an impossible tight-rope. The leadership was gradually wrested from Butt, who happily for himself sank into a Donegal Churchyard. In the day of his own trial Parnell recalled the old leader, and said : “ It will always be a comfort to me that I never in word or deed counselled the attacks made on him, and I allowed that old man to go down honoured to his grave.” From Butt he received the legacy of Home Rule, and he studied and steered the Land agitation as it affected his dream of an Irish Parliament. Dilke and Chamberlain cornered him privately in 1879, when, “ in spite of his great caution, he let out that if we chose to go to Ireland on Mill’s Land programme we could destroy his position and the Home Rule movement.”

Parnell was the obvious successor, but not without a struggle. Mr. Shaw, the elected leader, was deposed in his favour, and he turned to face the rising elements. Michael Davitt had set the damp heather on fire with the Land League. Home Rule was a dream, but land was bread and life to starving men. Before he realized where he was, Parnell the landlord was leading war against all owners of land. Betwixt

## SUBLIME FAILURES

criticizing Fenians and suspicious ecclesiastics he did not show his hand. He liked the Fenians the better of the two, but his aims were constitutional such as the Church would approve. Though he was at the head of insurgent democracy, he kept his aristocratic soul. Rome mistook him for a Mazzini and England regarded him as a silk-hat dynamiter. Their mistake was not for their historical good, but his character until his death and after was darkly concealed. Neither the Prophets of God nor the Statesmen of Empire could realize Parnell's immense import as the last person in history who could lead and leash the Irish as one.

Parnell knew exactly how far he could go between fanatical Fenians, who broke up his meetings, and old Archbishop MacHale, who gave the new movement sullen warning from the West. But Parnell was roused and he passed through the country cracking his tongue like whipcord. His sentences seared the Irish soul, for they desired action more than oratory.

Returning to the House he studied the rules of the House, stretched and broke them when necessary. He abolished flogging in the Army not out of love for the British soldier, but out of dislike of the cruelty. It is curious to find Chamberlain supporting him with other Radicals and thanking Parnell "for standing up alone against this system of flogging when I myself and other members had not the courage of our convictions". A tour through America enabled him to bring the American Irish into line.

## CHARLES STEWART PARNELL

At home eviction seeded outrage, and the agrarian wave became tipped with a red foam. Disraeli, who, like the Fenians, insisted on talking of Ireland in extreme terms, dissolved Parliament on the cry of separation. Parnell returned hurriedly from America to meet hostility in Wexford, where he and Redmond were mobbed to the curious cry that “the blood of Vinegar Hill is still green !” Three constituencies returned Parnell, who chose Cork. He had been accidentally nominated there with Tory money in order to split the Nationalist vote between himself and a Whig. The Tories in bidding for a vote-splitter reckoned without their host, for the name of Parnell carried Cork. He stayed there till his death.

Parnell was elected leader of the Irish Party by only five votes. The Liberals were in power and the gentler Home Rulers sat with them. Parnell decreed that his followers should sit in perpetual opposition as though they occupied foreign territory. Gladstone was in power, and the two great Parliamentarians came face to face. Parnell’s tactics were to sit between parties in England as he sat between the Clan naGael and the Church in Ireland. He introduced the practice of debate after the Speech from the Throne, and he was not above counting coats in the cloakroom before trying a snap division. He had set out in a sentimental errand such as his ancestors would have approved, but events were urging him towards the weir of revolution. At the worst he knew how to swim rather than sink in the

## SUBLIME FAILURES

boiling backwater. He had attracted Michael Davitt, a convict, an idealist, and a martyr, who set out to convert the American Fenians to support a movement they considered void and vain. Davitt was an Irish Lenin, and his caricature occurs in O'Donnell's *History of the Party* :—

“ Thither came tall, gaunt and worn Michael Davitt, with the Socialist's dream in his eyes and unappeasable wrath against the existence of feudalism. A true brother of Tom Paine and Rousseau, and very far from O'Neils and O'Donnells, ancient or modern. An infant in Ireland but an English-trained workman copiously ill-read and uneducated by the Mechanics Institute, inspired by the hot wine of Fenianism, a finer instrument of cosmopolitan discontent has never been draped in a tattered copy of the uniform of Robert Emmet. Parnell might have been a Nationalist. Davitt was a humanitarian Jacobin. Generally speaking a truth-loving man. As fit to counsel statesmanlike patriotism as a blind fiddler to manoeuvre the Channel Fleet.”

If this was a constitutional view of Davitt, it is only fair to preserve the sketch of Parnell which Davitt, after a period of bitter opposition followed by thirteen years of sober reflection, left in his *Fall of Feudalism in Ireland* :—

“ He was unlike all the leaders who had preceded him. He had neither wit nor humour, eloquence or the passion of conviction, Irish accent, appearance or mannerism . . . He had an essentially strong but not a broad or comprehensive mind. It was slow in grasping all the bearings of a problem or in seizing upon the chances or dangers of a situation, but once it caught hold, its power of concentrated application made him a match for greater intellects . . . Parnell was a man

## CHARLES STEWART PARNELL

of strong personal dislikes. He would forgive anything in a colleague or an opponent except a sin against or a slight of himself. This was unpardonable. His judgment of men was as defective as his confidence in them was governed by a morbid suspicion. Magnanimity or gratitude he had none. His mind had few if any generous impulses and was barren of all faith except a boundless belief in himself. Here he possessed the fanaticism of the zealot and made a fatalistic confidence in his own destiny the dominating idea of his political career. He frequently quoted two lines of Shakespeare, which inculcated fidelity to oneself as the rule of existence. Herein lay the secret of his pride and the vulnerable spot in Achilles' heel."

Meantime, the English were taking measure of Parnell. As Lord Cowper, the new Viceroy, afterwards confided :—

“ Our attention was concentrated on Parnell. We did not think he instituted outrages. We thought that he connived at them. We thought that he would stop at nothing to gain his end and his end was Separation. I think he was very English. He had neither the virtues nor the vices of an Irishman.”

The last sentence was one Tacitus would have enjoyed writing. Parnell never spoke wildly. His most perilous utterances were an interpretation of the moment in advance. His words were the foam on the crest of the breaking wave. He knew the wisdom of ebb as well as the strategy of the flow. He knew how to wait on the secrets of Fate and to ride upon Circumstance. *The Times* remarked that he was a safe prophet since he had the power of

## SUBLIME FAILURES

fulfilling his own prophecies. He judged debate not in terms of argument or phrase, but in time and pressure of temper. When Parliament would not proceed his way, he held up procedure until the rules were changed. It was as great a shock to Victorian England as though unruly Australians had caused a change in the laws of cricket or a foreign entrant had fouled a Derby field at Epsom. Parnell had to meet Gladstone when he was swollen with a great majority and a lifetime of Parliamentary cunning. For the second time the Grand Old Man met one worthy of his steel. Parnell invoked and launched "boycotting", which found a name for the first time, though the practice is recorded in the Talmud as the treatment accorded to strangers by the people of Sodom. Boycotting was Parnell's substitute for outrages. Nevertheless, he had loosed the flood.

Gladstone advanced to meet it with a Coercion Bill and a Land Bill, which covered all that Butt had struggled for. Parnell looked into the Land Bill with the discretion which the Trojans failed to apply to the gifts of the Greeks, in fact, as a gift-horse. The National Convention was in fierce favour of rejecting the Bill, when Parnell rose with icy composure to demand test cases. A forest of hands rose in instant submission. He refused responsibility for what was an obvious boon for the peasants, but he allowed the Bill to be played and landed by his gillies like an exhausted salmon. He would not allow Tenants to

## CHARLES STEWART PARNELL

rush in where Commissions feared to tread. He said that he had pushed the movement as far as it would constitutionally go. To defend himself from the extremists he still attacked Gladstone, "the masquerading knight-errant, this pretending champion of the rights of every nation except the Irish." And with a gleam of sinister prophecy he added : "No man is great in Ireland until he is dead and unable to do more for his country." He had thought out his action. Coercion was physical force on England's part, but he would never be betrayed into the disaster of a rising. He believed that railways made even guerilla warfare impossible in Ireland. He had studied the American Civil War. When he could no longer hold the agrarian wave in hand, he goaded Gladstone to arrest him. The Quaker Forster was Chief Secretary. Parnell stung him as "Buckshot" Forster. When his myrmidons swept him into Kilmainham, he murmured that Captain Moonlight would take his place. It was the nearest he ever came to declaring armed war against England, and his words sank into Irish allegiance. How deeply the Celtic soul was moved was shown in the belief that the great storm of October was caused by the protest of the elements.

Parnell took his arrest as a personal affront, which he never forgave Gladstone. In Kilmainham he said : "I'll live yet to trample on that Old Man's grave." Parnell's arrest came at the right time for him. Trembling detectives removed him as one who was

## SUBLIME FAILURES

“reasonably suspected of treasonable practices”. The extreme Fenians had thought he could be “treasonably suspected of reasonable practices”. One Fenian held out, John O’Leary asking if Ireland was to be freed by keeping the Speaker out of bed. Frank O’Donnell said : “Parnell talked daggers but he used none.” He may have taken a berth on the revolutionary train, but he had slipped off at a junction suitable to himself. He used to say : “The Fenians want to catch us, but they are not going to.” While he was behind prison walls all Fenianhood warmed towards him. In England the arrest was hailed with the delirium which would have greeted the capture of Nana Sahib. Ireland lay stricken in her chief, but the Invincibles moved in their blind burrows. Extreme men and Lady Land Leaguers took charge. The League issued a manifesto against all rent which Parnell disliked intensely and used Dillon to point out how impossible it was to carry in the face of the Bishops. Parnell remarked later that his own tenants were the only ones who had taken it seriously. After six months of tension and outrage something had to be done and the Government allowed Parnell to leave the Kilmainham Ark like a stormy petrel on the face of the waters. An excuse was found in the funeral of his nephew in Paris, a musical recluse who had died of a weakened brain. On his way Parnell saw McCarthy and Captain O’Shea, who though a Whig had voted for him against Shaw and was in touch with Chamberlain. Parnell was not anxious to propose

## CHARLES STEWART PARNELL

conditions of release, but the stronger part of the Cabinet were in favour of granting them. O'Shea had dispatched a letter which reached Gladstone, while Parnell visited Mrs. O'Shea at Eltham. She thrust his dying child into his arms. Its birth was announced in *The Times* of 25th April, the day opening the debate on the Bill. Parnell went on to Paris and returned to Kilmainham.

Little was this dramatic scene imagined at the time though already rumour connected Parnell with his follower's wife. She was already his secret soul, and whatever the perils underlying their love, they were only separable by death. The tale must be told intertwined with his public life. The fate which would not allow him to marry the Miss Woods he had loved in America, threw him into the orbit of one who had been Miss Wood in England. The sister of an English Field-Marshal, and the wife of Captain O'Shea, she became interested in Parnell's rising fame. For a wager she determined to invite one who eluded invitations. Parnell's home was still Avondale, and in London he occupied lonely lodgings. She sent for Parnell at the House, and when he appeared, a red rose fell at his feet which he kept to the hour of his death. They knew each other in that hour as though they had loved in past existences. There was neither courtship nor hesitation. As though in palliative for the leader she had captured, she devoted herself to the Irish cause and through her English connections became his emissary to Gladstone.

## SUBLIME FAILURES

Through the obscuring clouds of quarter of a century she afterwards penned the memory of their love. The world then learnt what was uppermost in the mind of the Kilmainham Sphynx. He was thinking with consuming agony of the woman whom he called "Queenie" and who was carrying the child of his passion. So deeply was he affected that he wrote offering to abandon Ireland for her sake. It was the kind of letter a suffering woman demands of her lover, an offer to throw up the whole world for the kingship of her body. His success and failure, his health and happiness were entrusted to her henceforth. She was his empress rather than his mistress and his sick-nurse more than either.

They are not to be judged, for they loved much and they were unafraid. They believed their love was their private affair, and when it was made public, they scorned excuse or repentance. Neither were Catholics or of Celtic blood. The Destiny, which gave him the leadership of the Irish, apparently made her its secret condition.

Mrs. O'Shea found herself moored between a doting old Victorian aunt and an adventurer-husband, by whom she had been neglected. He had not spent more than forty nights with her during their married life, it was supposed, and he was once absent for ten months. Willie O'Shea, the son of Irish bourgeois, had been sent to Oscott to make fine Catholic friends and into the Hussars to make finer Protestant ones. He was a gentleman by courtesy and an officer by

## CHARLES STEWART PARNELL

purchase. Mrs. O'Shea's old aunt approaching ninety, had settled her at Eltham and willed her a fortune, which tied her to respectability. The prospect of wealth served to keep O'Shea watchful if not faithful. To the old lady her niece was her "beautiful black swan". Half-spoilt and half-deserted, Kitty O'Shea put her hand into the lottery of love and at her first grasp drew Parnell. She had heard of him through her husband's admiration, when he was striking notice and seemed to Frank O'Donnell "a bit hero, a bit Catiline, a bit Fortune's favourite". She played her card, literally the visiting card she sent into the House of Commons, which brought him into her instant power. They were united by invisible bonds stronger than flesh or parchments. They enjoyed a telepathy which made each aware of the other's presence in the House. Secrecy and deception were necessary as once to Abelard and Heloise. O'Shea's first attitude had been pride that the rising leader found relaxation in his home. He encouraged his wife to minister to one, who was denied rest or happiness. Early in 1881 he noticed the liaison on one of his rare visits to Eltham, and issued a challenge. Only Mrs. O'Shea prevented them meeting with swords on the Continent, in which case the Irish cause would have suffered an earlier set-back. Political possibilities appeared on the horizon and O'Shea accepted a life of collusion which did no hurt to his heart. He entered into the delicate underground of politics, slipped between Parnell and Chamberlain, and nourished hopes of the Irish

## SUBLIME FAILURES

Under-Secretaryship. Well-wishers of Ireland must have often wished he could have changed places with Mr. Burke, who was approaching the close of his tenure in that post. His admiration for Parnell became seasoned with hate, but he realized the advantage of giving him his head down the primrose path of gallantry, while he waited in some dark and tortuous lane to compass his revenge. The fact remains that he had lost his wife before either lover had set an eye on each other. Her unhappy volume is filled with dire confusion. If O'Shea had accepted a position of collusion, as one biographer holds, he would have known that the subsequent children were not his. Two daughters were born to Parnell.

In a volume written to remove the tarnish from the O'Sheas, she implied against herself that she had taken O'Shea back for purposes of deception. If this is so, the coming of Parnell had caused the recurrence of their loveless embraces. It is pleasanter for Parnellites to believe that once she had accepted Parnell as her lover, their romance was undefiled, and that O'Shea was left without blinkers. A story related to Henry Harrison by her illustrates this point of view. On one occasion lover and husband met at Eltham. O'Shea passed unadvisedly into Mrs. O'Shea's room. Parnell entered without a word, threw her over his shoulder and carried her out. With the same remorseless passion he once threatened to hurl her with himself into the sea. Sooner rather than later O'Shea accepted the situation. A cuckold's life need not be an

## CHARLES STEWART PARNELL

unpleasant one, and there may be consolations. The part O'Shea played in framing the Kilmainham Treaty was one.

Parnell was harrowed with anxiety for Mrs. O'Shea during his six months in Kilmainham, but it was alarm at the extremists which made him bargain with the Government. In return for release and the change of policy he agreed to slow down the agitation. When Forster and the Viceroy resigned, it appeared to be a telling triumph, but Parnell was in a perilous pass. He went to Avondale where he met his sister, Mrs. Dickinson, in circumstances of Parnellian frigidity. She remarked that she had thought they would hang him. He gave a gloomy smile of acquiescence, and that was all. Parnell's triumphs were always short and dramatic and followed by compensatory darknesses. On release from Kilmainham he had sailed into the House while Forster was actually speaking. The cries of the Irish choked the words of the embittered Quaker.

The Treaty was construed as a sale of the Land League. The Ladies' Land League, which he promptly suppressed, impertinently told him he had better stayed in prison while they spent the funds and roused the country. Parnell realized his situation, and went down to Portland Prison to meet Davitt on his release, knowing he had to reckon with the Fenians. The following day he was saved from his secret difficulties by the Phoenix Park murders. At the same time his public perils began.

## SUBLIME FAILURES

An English crowd sighed for his blood, and only detectives kept him safe.

His other sister in charge of the Ladies' Land League was suppressed with difficulty, and referred to her brother as "Kitty and his cowardly crowd". The name of Mrs. O'Shea was rapidly becoming an open secret. In February, 1881, the anxious Irish envoys awaiting Parnell had opened one of her letters in Paris. They said they did not know whether he was in the Tower or the Thames. With fear and trembling they showed it to him and he had turned away without a word, showing them courtesy for the first time. When Healy knocked at his door, he "snarled to baffle inquiry". It now became known to the Cabinet, for O'Shea without leave of Parnell requested police protection for him from the Invincibles, whom Parnell had unsparingly denounced. The Home Secretary, Harcourt, blurted to the Cabinet that the instrument of the Treaty had been the husband of Parnell's mistress. So closely and intimately the love affair underran and undermined the affairs of state. It led to Parnell's habits of increasing secrecy and occasional disguise. His movements became unknown to his followers. Once he actually left his secretary in a moving cab and disappeared.

At this crisis Mrs. O'Shea played a vital part. She had seen him standing with his back to her as he opened the Sunday paper and read the terrible news. The movement of his shoulders and the expression in his face was unforgettable. He became demented,

## CHARLES STEWART PARNELL

and so lost control that he wrote to Gladstone offering to leave public life. The Government had no choice left but to bring back Coercion, which Parnell opposed dejected-wise. Only a woman's indomitable influence kept him in politics at all. The same woman implored Gladstone to stand by the Treaty and prevailed. She fell into the background, but not out of history, for she continued to be intermediary to Gladstone, all of which is discreetly omitted from Gladstone's Life. The lovers accepted life lived as it were on the slopes of a volcano, though Parnell moved their abode to Eastbourne and finally to Brighton.

Events powerful and predetermined hammered the Irish party into a phalanx between hostile armies. Gone were the laughable days when Isaac Butt exchanged soft pleadings and gracious compliments with the effortless front benches. The Home Rulers had included every variety save a leader. Parnell was a dire necessity, and he knew it as well as they. They had included Dillon, a selfless Catiline in a frockcoat : William O'Brien, a lovable Mad Mullah on his war-path : the astute journalism of T. P. O'Connor, the future father of the House and grandfather of Fleet Street : Sexton, a prosy Demosthenes : Dr. Kenny, described as "that mad Fenian apothecary", who gave Parnell his soul and was buried with Parnell's name on his tombstone. There were the Redmonds, Irish gentlemen, and Justin McCarthy, England's own historian. Parnell tended to substitute clerks and attorneys, who did his bidding implicitly, in place

## SUBLIME FAILURES

of the Conservative Home Rulers, with whom his secret heart remained. Clare was represented by an incongruous pair, the O'Gorman Mahon and Captain O'Shea. The O'Gorman was the magnificent hero of thirteen duels. He had bullied for O'Connell and served in the armies of the Tsar and the Emperor of Brazil. At a pinch he had handled the navy of Chile. Captain O'Shea was described as "a retired officer", but his true position was that of a retired husband. There was James O'Kelly, a Fenian who had served in the field against such different enemies as Sitting Bull and Bismarck. O'Kelly introduced Parnell to Victor Hugo. And there was the grotesque but relentless Biggar, who alone stood up to Parnell. He was the father of Obstruction and after he became a Catholic sometimes surprised worshippers by rising in his sleep and demanding a count. He took a count of votes in the House on the night that he died, an instance of courage that is rare amongst the brave.

Rallied by his Egeria, Parnell rallied the stricken Party. Henceforth he avoided agitation and even Ireland. He always loathed platform meetings. His supreme aim was an Irish Parliament, which he could make the conserving power of Irish life and resources. He told Davitt frankly that under Home Rule he would lock him up. Parnell washed his hands of blood, but he was not to hear the last of the Phoenix Park murders in his life. Forster returned to the House to reap his easy vengeance. He indicted

## CHARLES STEWART PARNELL

Parnell to the face, and Parnell was touched by his steel, crying out it was a lie when he was accused of conniving at the murders or when warned . . . But the Invincibles had given Parnell no warning and all the bridges had been cut between them and the Parliamentarians. He fronted the angry cries of Parnell ! Parnell ! which echoed through the House. With an effort of his will he seemed to place his soul beyond his assailants. His friends could scarcely induce him to speak, but his answer was contemptuous. By the judgment of the Irish people only did he stand or fall, and Destiny noted the words with grim precision. It took a Special Commission subsequently to disabuse the English mind that Parnell was not imbued with assassination. The Phœnix Park preyed on his thought. Those, who had best reasons to know, knew that he kept the constitutional course. In public speech Spencer said that he could not trace outrages to Parnell or Parnellite. At Parnell's request he wrote out the words on a piece of paper, which he later noticed Parnell coolly reading to the House. Not a member dreamed that he was using the Viceroy's autograph.

Parnell was now king uncrowned and unseen. He only appeared at moments when it was vital. He swooped on the Monaghan Election of 1883 to hurl Tim Healy into Ulster, and the next year to return his candidate from Tipperary. In 1886 a fateful election in Galway required extreme use of dictatorship. At the Monaghan Election a wire from

## SUBLIME FAILURES

Mrs. O'Shea was opened by Philip Callan, whom Parnell turned out of Dundalk to make room for Charles Russell after a bitter struggle. Callan's reference to Mrs. O'Shea was published in the *Irish Times*, the first shadow of the end.

Parnell had decided to bind the Irish Party by pledge to himself against any other party. In 1885 he combined with the Tories to throw out the Liberals. It was only human as well as political that alliance should flutter the Tories. Parnell was ready for bids. Lord Carnarvon, the Tory Viceroy, had an interview with Parnell in an empty house while Salisbury made a speech at Newport to court the Irish vote. The essential fact was that Parnell had the eighty votes needed to efface the Liberal majority. He met Carnarvon, and was left with the impression that, Carnarvon being a Home Ruler, the Cabinet were willing to be the same. The Cabinet knew nothing of the interview, which was Salisbury's underhand manner of trying slippery ground ahead. Parnell naturally allowed Carnarvon to be "very much the larger contributor". They discussed an Irish Constitution and Parnell told him about his quarries and gold-mining in Wicklow. The conversations were private as between gentlemen, and were faithfully reported to Salisbury. Carnarvon was unable to induce his colleagues to follow him, so the Ministry of Caretakers left office and a General Election took place, making Parnell the dictator of England as well of Ireland. He dropped all agitation and declared

## CHARLES STEWART PARSELL

for a one-plank platform, National Independence. He destroyed the Whigs in Ireland and gave the Irish vote in England to the Tories, with the result that he held the balance. Salisbury could dish the Whigs by following Carnarvon. Gladstone could out-trump the Tories by adopting Home Rule. If Carnarvon was ahead of his leader, Chamberlain fell behind his. Like St. Paul Parnell or at least his deputy had succeeded in converting his jailer. Charles Russell had wrought on the Old Man. Frank O'Donnell wrote not far from truth that "the alliance between the sanguine Premier and the silent agitator was favoured, counselled, cemented, and continued" by Russell. Gladstone declared for Home Rule, losing three able lieutenants on the way, and a struggle began, which was not closed in the lifetime of any protagonist. In a revealing letter to McCarthy, Parnell showed that he would have preferred to receive an Irish Parliament from the Tories. "I think that the Conservatives in shrinking from dealing with the question are little regardful of the interests of the Irish landowning class since they might have obtained guarantees which the Liberals will have no interest in insisting upon."

The vital incident was the break between Chamberlain and Gladstone. It was not that Chamberlain forsook the Old Man, but that he was gently pushed out. He was given minor office instead of a Secretaryship of State. "This humiliation," recalled Healy, "cost Ireland dear and kept us thirty

## SUBLIME FAILURES

years in the wilderness.” Gladstone was strong enough to snub Chamberlain, but Parnell did not feel he could snub O’Shea, who was petulantly demanding a seat. It was thought advisable to conceal him under the ægis of Gladstonian Liberalism. A Liverpool constituency was selected, but for safety he was not nominated till the last moment. A Liberal was chosen and Parnell arrived with O’Shea to pass callously down the adoring ranks of the Irish and substitute the name of O’Shea. But a number of cards had been distributed with the other name and by a small number of votes O’Shea missed the seat. O’Shea still demanded his price, and T. P. O’Connor, having resigned Galway into Parnell’s hands, Parnell put him forward. Healy and Biggar instantly crossed to tell Galway Parnell’s exact relations to O’Shea. O’Shea arrived and denied them on his knees to the Bishop of Galway, but he boasted that Parnell would soon be running his errands. A local candidate was raised, and in answer to O’Shea’s alarm Parnell telegraphed that he was approaching and “grave would be the responsibility of whoever attempted to weaken his influence and power”. Biggar wished to mob Parnell on arrival, but Parnell subdued the sullen crowd by showing them that he had an Irish Parliament in the hollow of his hand. “Destroy me and you take away that Parliament.” He nominated O’Shea: “With a gulp he declared it carried,” recalled Healy. “If his heart-strings writhed, his stoicism did not fail.” O’Shea was declared

## CHARLES STEWART PARNELL

member, a very different type to that celebrated by Balladry to be “ the Man for Galway ”.

That evening Parnell showed where his respect lay. It was Biggar whom he invited to dinner. Healy had drawn up the Party Pledge, which even Parnell signed, but O’Shea was left free to vote and he showed his gratitude by not voting for the Home Rule Bill. As the great debates approached their conclusion, debates over which the whole Empire brooded, Parnell remembered the Carnarvon interview and said in the House that if the Conservatives had been successful, he had reason to suppose they would offer an Irish Parliament with power to protect Irish industries. Hicks Beach rose to deny the suggestion furiously, and Parnell, amid gusts of dramatic cheering and counter-cheering, asked whether that intention had not been communicated to him by a Minister of the Crown? Gladstone had had wind of the Carnarvon interview, and even sent Parnell word to make a signal if he could bring himself to make a revelation, but according to Healy’s memory Parnell “ hung limp and irresolute ”. He was assailed to give the name, and in spite of the fierce temptation he kept Carnarvon unsaid. Never was he less Irish and more English than in that moment. There were two views, considering he had gone as far as he did. Barry O’Brien regarded it as “ the most serious offence of his political life ”. On the other hand, Healy wrote, “ after an assault such as Beach’s, who could have blamed Parnell if he had stated the facts. Yet he kept

## SUBLIME FAILURES

Carnarvon's secret." Carnarvon promptly revealed Salisbury's connivance in the Lords. Parnell appears to have been absurdly confident that this very limited Bill would pass. He had given his Party the choice of accepting it or smashing the Cabinet. He was anxious to show no defiance. He appealed to England to be "wise enough, brave enough, and generous enough to close the strife of centuries". They were words which were worth more in blood and treasure to England than she could dream.

The whole Irish Party felt a genuine sympathy for Gladstone. Parnell alone seemed to watch sardonically the quagmire into which he had led his old enemy. A second phase of his career was opening in which he essayed to ride two Parties instead of one. The Liberals were bound to him, and Gladstone's cronies secretly resented the invisible fetters. The Unionists returned to office and put their best man into the Irish Secretaryship to face the dreaded Irish leader. Both Hicks Beach and Parnell were suffering from broken health and Parnell was in very moderate mood when asking leave to introduce his Tenants' Relief Bill. Hicks Beach himself was privately struggling with monstrous landlords like Clanrickarde. The Bill was thrown out and the Plan of Campaign took its place. Parnell was too ill to voice his disapproval, and he gave himself as a dying man to Mrs. O'Shea and the doctors. O'Shea had been last seen gloating from the gallery over the defeat of the Home Rule Bill. His leader, Chamberlain,

## CHARLES STEWART PARNELL

was now in the wilderness, and O'Shea followed him like a scapegoat. Parnell was absent from Ireland for two years. Grimly he allowed Gladstone to make the running for him while the Liberals shared the burden with the Irish. The Tory majority was slowly sinking and Parnell was waiting. No man desired peace more, both private and public. His haggard, bearded face, well shown in the *Vanity Fair* caricature, grew weird and ghastly, reminding observers of one who had peered into Hell. The Plan, championed by O'Brien and Dillon, made its irregular way into forty estates. Parnell, to the chagrin of his followers and of Liberals, who were trying to be more Irish than the Irish Party themselves, made it responsible for the new Coercion Act. After seventeen nights of obstruction he moved an amendment so vague as neither to approve nor condemn the Plan. He had perhaps originated the Plan himself in Kilmainham, when he said he would never head another agrarian movement unless tenants lodged three-quarters of their rent. But times had changed, and he was dead against the Plan, which he saw first in the papers. He wanted that peace in Ireland which neither England nor his Party would give him. One hand at least was stretched out to meet him from the heights of imperial thinking. Ireland was no longer to be "the Cinderella of Empire" for Rhodes sent £10,000 to pay for her coach to College Green.

The Plan brought new trouble on the horizon. The Holy See always believed Parnell to be a

## SUBLIME FAILURES

dangerous revolutionary. The Vatican had condemned the National Tribute to Parnell, to which several Maynooth professors, including a future Cardinal, promptly subscribed. Parnell had accepted the cheque for £37,000 without mentioning it. It was a king's ransom. The Vatican now condemned the Plan. Probably Parnell would have agreed with the sentiments of the Holy See, who would have been surprised to overhear his complaint to Morley in 1888 that the Liberals, who had once imprisoned him for agitation, now wanted him to stir up the country for political purposes. Indeed, the unhappy country was wallowing between the Pyrrhic victories of the Plan and Coercion tempered by Mr. Balfour's philosophy. Once more the Government had thrown their best man into the gap.

There were few pauses in Parnell's career. *The Times* thought good to cut the deadlock in politics by blasting the leader. Articles appeared on *Parnellism and Crime*, salted with a forged letter from Parnell condoning the Phoenix Park murders. Parnell never read *The Times*, and paid no attention to the serial in his honour until the facsimile of this letter was published. What was happening behind the scenes? The Tories had their Invincibles as well as Ireland who were just as willing to stab blindly in the dark. Dr. Maguire, of Trinity, sallied forth as paymaster to Paris, and paid £2,000 into the unseen. A brilliant blackguard called Dick Pigott, worthy of a joint novel from Lever and Carleton, provided

## CHARLES STEWART PARNELL

all the forgeries possible or imaginable. He was hired at a guinea a day to destroy Parnell and among those who subscribed funds was Gladstone's seceding Whip, Lord Richard Grosvenor. The unlucky Lord had once backed O'Shea for a place. He was now putting his money in the hands of a welsher. Pigott's naive cunning could hardly have stood the test of appearance in Melodrama. He was charitably described once as "an unprejudiced sponge". As Healy wrote in his *Memoirs*, "to ensnare a newspaper like *The Times*, a leader like Parnell and baffle a genius like Gladstone, by advice which a schoolboy would have thought clumsy, was a gamester's apotheosis." From Ireland arose an underchorus pointing to Pigott as the forger. Curiously enough the only person who thought otherwise was Parnell. He grimly suspected O'Shea, and for that reason alone delayed bringing a case. He knew that his enemy awaited him. Without anger or excitement Parnell denied the letter in the House. He had changed his cramped style three times so that he could generally tell the date from the script. *The Times* had been "bamboozled", and it was "an anonymous fabrication". Nevertheless, millions of honest Englishmen went to bed knowing better. Parnell, the rat in John Bull's granary, had been trapped at last !

Parnell took no action until Frank O'Donnell brought a case against *The Times*. Parnell, advised by Charles Russell and George Lewis, the quintessence

## SUBLIME FAILURES

of Celtic and Jewish brains, began to move. He obtained an order from the Court to inspect the documents. *The Times* had to show its hand, and he was grimly relieved not to find compromising letters between Egan and the Invincibles or concerning the O'Sheas.

*The Times* took their chance believing Parnell feared to go into Court. The Government, whose existence depended on his destruction, noted that he failed to bring a libel action, and meditated a blow of their own. When Parnell asked the Government for a Select Committee to investigate the letter, the right worthy W. H. Smith was Leader of the House. After due consultation with the powers of the law he offered Parnell a Commission of three Judges with a net wide enough to catch everybody in the Irish movement, as though he were unwilling to risk catching Parnell on a single hook. He had asked for redress from a single forged letter. The Government replied by calling Ireland to trial. Parnell allowed the Commission to pass. The trap might snap on the trapper. The Commission afforded a possible parallel to the Dreyfus Trial. In each case a palpable forgery involved criminal disgrace. In each case a persecuted race was attacked in an individual. In each case the forger committed suicide, and the accused was eventually triumphant. Nations were divided, meanwhile, and Justice herself forced the pace. Parnell took the case into his hands until he had the forger nailed. Egan forwarded a letter of Pigott with one

## CHARLES STEWART PARNELL

of the misspellings in the forged letter. Archbishop Walsh sent letters of Pigott foretelling what *The Times* was about to publish. Pigott collapsed in the box under dissection from Russell. Two days were sufficient, and after an evening at the Alhambra he escaped thence to Madrid and thence God only knows ! When he blew out his brains, he carried Catholic scapulars and his last thought was for the children, to whom his pickings from the Unionist chest were devoted. History places him amongst the world's great hoaxers, with Theodore Hook and the Cobbler of Koepenick.

After this resounding victory Parnell's instinct was to withdraw, but Russell had his great seven-day speech to deliver and the Commission continued. He took a cynical interest in his advisers. "Lewis pays Russell refreshers in the morning," it was said, "and wins them from him at night with cards." Parnell did not want Russell's magnificent apologia for Ireland. It was like a display of fireworks on the day after a battle. *The Times* made desperate efforts to get real proofs from a Fenian in Nebraska, using cipher messages, which were taken to Archbishop Walsh to decipher, as a result of which the code of the British Services had to be changed. "That was the sole gain to the State from the Forgery Commission," quoth Tim Healy. Parnell returned to the House and challenged a single Tory to support the forged letter "by a shake of his head or a nod or a word". They sat in ungroaning silence. At this

## SUBLIME FAILURES

point, before the final shadows gather, his official biographer sounds the trumpet : "He had defeated all his enemies in detail. Forster had been crushed, the Pope repulsed, Mr. Gladstone conquered, *The Times* overthrown, the Tories shaken, the Liberals scattered and subdued. No man, no party, no force which had come into conflict with him escaped unscathed."

The result of the Commission was an ovation in the House. Every member with the exception of Lord Hartington, rose to greet Parnell. "Why did you fellows stand up?" he murmured, "it almost frightened me." There was very little difference between his word now and law. English audiences were as delighted to hail him as the Irish. He received the freedom of Edinburgh not without keen division and made a speech of gratitude sickening to Fenian sentiments. He was strong enough to kick away the ladder of the Extremists. He was entertained by the Eighty Club and shook hands with Spencer and Rosebery. Incidentally he slighted the Plan of Campaign in his speech, but according to Wilfred Blunt's Diary he declared privately that night that it had been the saving of the Irish people. "I should like to know what Parnell's politics really are," Biggar used to say.

Finally came a visit to Hawarden to discuss the coming Home Rule Bill. It was the nearest that Gladstone ever came to Canossa. They were nervous with each other, but to Parnell's great amusement

## CHARLES STEWART PARNELL

Gladstone's granddaughter reminded the Old Man that he had not shown his guest the dungeon. Though Parnell was accused of lacking humour, he enjoyed unconscious irony. His fated position was never a smiling one, but certain flashes are recorded. He could not see that *Alice in Wonderland* was a humorous book, but he was greatly amused watching an enthusiastic woman waving her baby instead of a flag. Ignorance of Irish history was part of his legend, but Davitt found him intimately learned in the Cromwellian chapter at least. He was described as a man out of Plutarch with no modern knowledge or education. He was not bookish, but he possessed the mathematical side of learning. His knowledge of astronomy and metallurgy was that of a persistent amateur. In the midst of seething politics he turned to crucible and microscope to extract a grain from that Wicklow gold mine, which, Byron said : "Yields enough, just enough, ore to gild a bad guinea." He loved the sports of the countryside, and he shot the grouse at Aughavanna. In youth he hunted fiercely, but later he kept his stable in England and deprived a horse-loving race of the pleasure of seeing their king on horseback. Typically of his paradox he could tie fishing flies beautifully, but he never fished.

Strangest of his elements was superstition. The man, who supported Bradlaugh, feared the number thirteen : so much so that he once introduced a clause he did not approve into a Land Bill lest it should have

## SUBLIME FAILURES

the dreaded number of constituents. He had a horror of green, to which he attributed Ireland's disastrous luck. He saw omens where others only saw accidents. Only Rembrandt could have painted the scene when one of four candles at his bedside went out, and he fiercely blew another out. Healy was startled : "The sincerity of his tone, the motion to quench the candle, the seer-like face gruesomely impressed me. Yet I marvelled that anyone could believe that the Almighty would allow His decrees to be affected by a candle more or less." Yet there is a soothing power in lighting one before a shrine. Parnell did not believe in Providence. His god was Fate, and his god's deputy was himself.

While Parnell was basking at Hawarden, the meshes of an iron net were being thrown in his path. During 1890 Parnell was menaced by a petition for Divorce which O'Shea had filed at last. Parnell received the papers coolly, and, having had a strong case of collusion prepared by Lewis, assured Davitt that he would emerge with unstained honour. Davitt repeated this to Archbishop Walsh as an assurance of innocence. Herein the Protestant and Catholic viewpoints were at variance. Parnell only meant that he could defeat O'Shea. Millions of Irish believed that O'Shea was the successor of Pigott, and renewed allegiance more fiercely than ever. O'Shea's motives were obvious, though none could say whether revenge or avarice were uppermost. During the Commission he had entered the box and professed to recognize Parnell's

## CHARLES STEWART PARNELL

handwriting in the forged letter. Under cross-examination he admitted that he appeared by means of Chamberlain. Nothing can have been more dramatic than the look of hatred which passed between the fathers of Mrs. O'Shea's children. From that moment O'Shea took counsel to destroy his supplanter. As he left no memoirs and Chamberlain's biography remains unfinished, an aspect of the question, against which all biographers of Parnell come like a stone wall, must be set aside. It is even improbable, perhaps impossible, that Chamberlain prompted the petition. A more likely motive was the money which Aunt Ben had left to Mrs. O'Shea. Was it all to be lavished on Parnell and on the daughters of Parnell? Even an O'Shea will turn, and he realized that the Courts would give him the custody of the children in an undefended action. Hence the additional agony to Parnell and the inquiries which he started at this time, whether there was a foreign country in which Mrs. O'Shea could be secure with her children. Lewis advised fighting the case, but Parnell wished the case to go by default. She had realized the splendid chance of becoming Mrs. Parnell. This is clear from her fierce words to counsel (Sir Frank Lockwood): "If you win this case I must be O'Shea's wife for life, and may death not be long!" So the petitioners had the case to themselves and made it both degrading and ridiculous. Parnell was alleged by a housemaid to have escaped by a fire-escape. There was no cross-examination and no counter-case.

## SUBLIME FAILURES

O'Shea remarked afterwards : “ The joke of it was that there was no fire-escape at all.”

The train of destiny was set, and, once started, nothing but contradictions and disaster could follow. Everybody was bewildered except Parnell. His followers at first signalled support in his trial, and re-elected him Chairman. Meantime there had been English ripples. The Nonconformists sought to save their conscience, the Liberals their Party, and the inner knot of Gladstonians the waning career of Gladstone. The Liberal Whips set the board so that one or the other must go. Gladstone was too old to meet the situation as firmly as Parnell. He refused to sit in judgment or write direct, but he sent a letter to Morley into which Morley insisted he should insert the sentence that, if Parnell remained, Gladstone's leadership became a nullity. Morley scribbled the fatal words as the thing most likely to move Parnell, though Gladstone believed that he was only adding a postscript. Postscript or ultimatum, it rent the Irish Party in twain. Only Spencer doubted if it were right to put the screw on Parnell, as he alone could drive the Irish team. The “ sovereign and steadfast unselfishness ” of the Master of the Pytchley stood like a tower in those days. He was right, for the Parnellites rallied like hornets at the threat of English dictation. The letter to Morley was met by a death-or-glory Manifesto in which Parnell, the moderating statesman, threw himself on the blind support of the hillsmen and Fenians. His fierce pride

## CHARLES STEWART PARNELL

was indubitably backed by a woman's fury. Those who supported him at the first, like Healy, then wished only to see him resign his seat and perhaps pass into short retirement. The Irish Bishops, sorely troubled, waited for some covering hint of repentance, but marble cannot pretend to be clay. They condemned him with a crushing combination of crosiers, marking him with "scandalous pre-eminence in guilt and shame". The Irish Party sat in Committee to depose their king, and he sat over them day by day with a withering gloom in his face, until they said they felt that he was judging them for adultery with his wife. He fought them with his old tenacity and tactics. Never did his stricken legion admire him more. There was method behind his frenzy. Time was on his side. He was only 45, and Gladstone was in sight of the grave. Parnell had only to survive until the Elections. Either the Tories defeated his Gladstonian enemies for him, or the Liberals won, and failed to bring Home Rule. Ireland would turn to him in each case. But his Party would not allow him time, and Parliament itself was hushed to hear the discordant voices from Committee Room Fifteen. There were eloquent and heart-broken words, and there were bitter exchanges. Parnell was never more explicit, more wary, and more biting. He stood like a huntsman warding off his own hounds with his whip. In vain he spoke of Gladstone as "the unrivalled coercionist—the unrivalled sophist". Gladstone had weaned two-thirds of his party from

## SUBLIME FAILURES

him. They resented his abuse of the Old Man and the sudden criticism of the private conversations at Hawarden. On the other hand, he assailed them for electing him one day and deposing him another. At a sublime moment he cried : "Don't sell me for nothing. If you get my value you may change me to-morrow." In vain the clan loyalty of the Redmonds and Nolans ! The fierce and fanatical majority led by Healy and Sexton drove him into the wall. At one moment he was accused of acting unfaithfully to the evicted under the Plan, but fiercely he rapped : "Who made the plan ? Whose brain planned it ? Who got the money for the Irish tenants, and devised the plan by which it was obtained ?" Sexton then claimed it and Parnell counterclaimed. The moral issue was always kept in the background, for few dared cast the stone in Parnell's face. But when Redmond queried Gladstone becoming master of the Irish Party, Healy hissed : who was its mistress ? Later he gave his reason for not supporting Parnell that he was useless for any purpose, whereat a Parnellite declared mid loud cheers there was life in the old dog yet ! One member pathetically condoned the leader's lapse as of one compelled to leave his virtuous Erin to live in the London Babylon. Parnell sat with a wintry smile. The Party was wrought to heights and depths not without sallies of humour. The kernel of the debate was contained in the short and stringent sentences uttered on 4th December :

CHARLES STEWART PARRELL

“ Parnell. . . . It is my answer and upon that answer I will stand or fall before the country.

Healy. Then you will fall. And now that both sides have made up their minds, what is the use of further debate ?

Leamy. Away with him ! Away with him !

John O'Connor. Crucify him !”

Healy declared they would vote Parnell’s deposition that day, to-morrow, Saturday, or Sunday, whereat Colonel Nolan shouted amid laughter, “ I will not sit on Sunday ” ! as though the Parnellites clung to one Commandment. The last challenges followed before the Party broke up for ever.

“ Healy. Our position is plain and unmistakable.

Parnell. Hear, hear.

Healy. Your position is plain.

Parnell. Hear, hear.

Healy. Let us come then to the issue. You declare that the country is for you. Go to it.

Parnell. So we will.”

And there were days and days of such with all the emotional undercurrents of love and hate and irony and surprise and fury, that only a Celtic audience can inspire in antagonists. On the following night, Parnell told Mr. Tuohy, the correspondent of the *Freeman*, that Biggar (who died in January) had appeared to him. Parnell was not helpful to the unhappy Seceders. He trapped them in their own words. He offered them retirement on conditions

## SUBLIME FAILURES

that Gladstone gave them guarantees. They went, but Gladstone threw them back into the maelstrom. At one time Parnell asked for forty-eight hours which was gladly conceded, and even then a gesture of retirement would have united the ranks. But he never swerved. It was not in his nature. He was a spear-head, not a pliant bow. Healy personifying the opposition, passed through a whole gamut of emotion. He began by defending Parnell as "an institution, not a man". Then he came to think of him (as in his *Memoirs*) as "a worm-eaten pedestal". In spite of his personal bitterness he broke down at one moment, and Parnell's arm was stretched to comfort him. "Healy is all right as long as he is afraid of you." Though it is easy to arraign the anti-Parnellites as traitors, they were anguished at heart. They had lived lonely and restricted lives in the midst of a foreign country. They were poor but incorruptible. Several of them had the advance terms of Home Rule, which could have been disposed to the Press for thousands. Nothing less than the belief that they were choosing between their leader and their Church could have stripped Parnell of such devoted men. Gladstone said to Morley: "Homer's fellows would have made short work in that Committee room." But did they, when Achilles sulked in his tent for a similar cause? Parnell hoped they would be as powerless without him as the Greeks without their leader. But he had embarked on a struggle that could only be won with good conscience and good

## CHARLES STEWART PARNELL

health. Unseen powers and irresistible powers were marching against him. As Frank O'Donnell wrote :

“ It was easy, ingloriously easy, for Gladstone to defeat and ruin Parnell. Parnell’s party was so sapped and mined and divided. The action of the Churchmen was so overwhelming. And the haggard, hunted figure of the betrayed Chief was so tragically pitiful in his hopeless courage and defence. The gallant quarry never had a chance. With sore sickness and worn nerve and sinew, pulse and brain, all powers temporal and spiritual combined against one heart-broken and insulted man.”

The fight was carried to Ireland as soon as a new Chairman had been elected, in the words of *Punch* : “ Parnell just out, McCarthy Justin.” In the abusive deluge which followed on every side, Parnell scarcely competed. He described his successor as “ a very nice old gentleman for a small tea party ”. As his mourning mother wrote after his death, “ your brother never called one of them by any fool-names. He only told facts, and only called Davitt a political jackdaw.” He had uttered all his bitterness in his Manifesto, asking them not to throw him to the English wolves howling for his destruction. This was taken as a slight on the Liberal Party, but wolves there were elsewhere. History barely records the secret and consuming minglement of fear and hatred which existed for Parnell in England. He had destroyed Parliament. He was destroying property. He was

## SUBLIME FAILURES

destroying the Empire, and finally was he not destroying morality itself by flaunting a divorce in public life? Neither Kruger nor the Kaiser ever aroused such intensity of feeling in the English breast. O'Shea was reckoned a public benefactor. Lord Morris, speaking for Irish Tories, remarked that Mrs. O'Shea was the first woman since Joan of Arc to save her country. Parnell was compared to Robespierre brought to the scaffold in the reaction of Thermidor, or to Mirabeau in whom a private fault destroyed the Saviour of his country. Davitt finely compared him to Samson Agonistes pulling down the pillars of the Temple over his head. But it was the temple of his own people not of his foes, a temple he had built with his own brain and hands.

It was said that Ireland only lost Home Rule by a hairsbreadth. "Only a woman's hair!" might have sounded like an echo from the vaults where lay a certain Dean of St. Patrick's.

The curtain begins to fall.

By-elections were fought with unmitigated fury, and Parnell was defeated in Kilkenny, Sligo, and Carlow. At the time of the split, Sir John Pope Hennessy was candidate for Kilkenny, and veered against the leader. Seventy members of Parliament joined in the fight, but only one priest supported Parnell. Lime, it was said, was thrown into his eye. His opponents said flour, but it made a couplet for James Joyce:—

## CHARLES STEWART PARNELL

“Ireland’s humour wet or dry  
Flung the quicklime into Parnell’s eye.”

The grossest ill-taste was drowned in savagery. The Redmonds were met by banners in the form of a woman’s shift. Parnell was spared no word, not the most shameless. Much was said which is best left to the rains to wash away in the graveyards of Ireland. Only one consolation was left to the shrinking lovers. Their enemies never discovered his secret name for her, “Queenie,” and the cries of “Kitty” left him unstung. It was not the Bishops only. It was the phalanx of Curates, who had moved against him and, more formidable than either, the women of Ireland.

He still made spasmodic appearances in the House. In April of 1891, he joined in debate with Balfour, “strikingly clever and astute,” noted Morley, who drew a final picture of the rent legion : “Healy spoke rasping bitter biting against Parnell, but not over-effectual. However, it roused Parnell. I have never seen such a sight of concentrated fury. He was not a foot off from Healy and Sexton. He glared into their very faces, hate and revenge in his eyes and in the harsh passionate tone of voice.” In June he married Mrs. O’Shea, and lost the *Freeman’s Journal* and scores of followers.

He fought on undauntedly until September, when he made his last speech in the West to the rainy hill-sides, and returned to die at Brighton in the arms of

## SUBLIME FAILURES

the woman for whom he had laid down his life, his honour, and his country.

“ Thus piteously Love closed what he begat.  
These two were rapid falcons in a snare  
Condemned to do the flitting of a bat.”

His last words were for her, and not for the Party who believed he had sent them a message of dying affection. She rewarded him by selling the poor agonized letters of his heart a quarter of a century later.

She forgot their common martyrdom when her nakedness had been tarred and feathered on a hundred platforms, and her fluttering heart stretched on the pillory. Parnell’s own agony remains inscrutable. Pride and courage alone can have staunched the poisoned wounds which the Irish dealt him. It might have occurred to Tacitus to say that the people who had loved him for his hatred, now hated him for his love.

It was October, the month in which Parnell said that something always happened to him. His strange superstitions remained with him to the end. Dread of the colour green and of numbers and omens had taken the place of religion. The uncanny strain was never absent from Parnell. He could hypnotize those to whom he spoke. He hypnotized himself. He could have been a successful lion-tamer. His conduct in the end was preternatural. A strange and unique combination of elements was breaking up. Shortly

## CHARLES STEWART PARNELL

before he died, a figure resembling him was seen to enter a room. It was thought it must be Parnell's brother. Later, Parnell arrived and entered the room, but returned immediately, for it was empty. Was it his fetch which was seen? At least he was not without warning of death, and seemed careless whither he drove himself.

His body was sent for burial to the great Fenian City of Dublin, which had been true to him and not to Cork, which threw down Redmond when he attempted to fight the vacant seat. The old flags of the Volunteers from Avondale were upon his coffin, and within lay the leaves of a faded rose, first and last gift of his enchantress. No Banshee shrieked, but his mother cried her grief to John Parnell: "Knowing how ill he had been for years, instead of healing his wound, his griefs, they had no mercy on him. They vowed his death. God will render to them full measure . . ." The same brother recorded the only words that ever came back from the tomb. Six years later he was awakened in the night at Avondale by a vision of Charley, who told him that the Irish Party would unite under Redmond and disappeared in anger. It is easy to believe that so strong and unhappy a spirit remained earth-bound and but slowly yielded its tremendous components: "exultations, agonies and love and man's unconquerable mind."

That sixth of October sent a wonderful trio to Charon's boat. The Right Worthy and Honourable

## SUBLIME FAILURES

W. H. Smith, who had moved the Parnell Commission and reported him to the Queen for speaking “even wickedly” in the House and Pope Hennessy, who gave Parnell his first death blow, had died the same day and sat upon the same thwart. Looking beyond them into the stars, which fascinated him as he had once fascinated men, stood the shade of the injured Irish leader.

COVENTRY PATMORE

1823-1896





## COVENTRY PATMORE

IN the National Portrait Gallery is Sargent's portrait of a Victorian poet, who wrote the most touching of Nineteenth Century poems: *The Angel in the House*. That alone should have made him symbolic of the Victorian Parnassus. The Poem was not unsuccessful, if a love-poem's duty is to bring praise from other poets to its author: amusement to some and inspiration to many. In the end it fell under the same criticism, which found Milton's Epic tedious, and a day has arrived when it is sought by neither lovers nor collectors. It described a matrimonial Paradise gained, and like Milton's *Paradise Lost* it was a work of art. It can never entirely perish. It flows with trite and spontaneous sentiment, but it was made spick and span by an art which smoothed away its own artificiality.

Sargent did not miss this trait in his sitter. His portrait of Coventry Patmore recalls the lissom strokes and tremendous touches by which a Japanese artist makes bird life seem as elusive on paper as in the open air. Birds often caricature men, and sometimes human beings display avian resemblances. Sargent detected the sparrow and the crane rather than a nightingale or an eagle of song in Patmore. The facial expression is exaggerated, and the clothes

## SUBLIME FAILURES

elongated till there is reminder of a Greco in modern dress. Among the many dull impressions stored in the National Valhalla Sargent's picture is an exotic in the Victorian conservatory. He caught Patmore in a mood of righteous indignation which the poet likened on the canvas to a nigger-driver's. Coventry Patmore lived from 1823 to 1896. His poetic fame is commemorated by the great domestic Epic, which he wrote as an Anglican and by the flaming Odes of his later experience when he was a Roman Catholic. His *Biography* by Basil Champneys is one of those family scrapbooks, which swell the annals of a quiet era. Patmore's bright personality was enclosed in two volumes, which showed signs that the author was an architect. If books and buildings ever reflect each other: if the modern historian's scope is symbolized by a pigeon-holed Albert Hall, if Euston Station indicates the ponderous rapture of an Editor of Encyclopædias, and the serial writer might be detected in the feuilleton flats which make up Grosvenor House, the Life of Patmore seems to have been taken from the designs of a furniture depository. But even a depository becomes interesting when filled with the stuff of so curious a life as Patmore's.

In the background hangs the faded daguerrotype of Patmore's father. Speculations in the childhood of British railways had earned him a penurious old age. He was once involved as second in a fatal duel, and wrote what can be better commemorated than quoted: "a dreary poem about an unhappy marriage." He

## COVENTRY PATMORE

was the recipient of the letters which compose Hazlitt's sensuous *Liber Amoris*, " morbid trash " based on an intrigue with a landlady's daughter, a literary type reserved to undergraduate verse. Some unpublished parts of the correspondence were found by Coventry and sent to the son of Hazlitt, who pilloried them to Patmore's horror in the auction room. It was worse than the sin of Ham, for Ham did not charge a fee to witness his father's nakedness.

Patmore was brought up entirely outside the zone of the supernatural. Victorian parents were thorough going, whichever line they took. The infant Coventry was forbidden to lisp the Lord's Prayer even, lest it might interfere with his " future freedom of intellect ". His father's influence was too slight to trace, but Coventry had perhaps remembered the poem about an unhappy marriage, for once he solemnly advised a girl to be married in a dress of black velvet ! Of his mother little survived except a scrap of enigma to say : " Baby is quite well. Will you bring Rabbit and Brandy ? " It is uncertain whether the maternal thought represented the nourishment of genius or something as symbolical as Mr. Pickwick's " chops and tomatoes ".

Like a true Victorian, Patmore was himself from beginning to end. He was a poet born. In autobiography he recalled that " Angels spoke from time to time to him and he frequently saw the things of earth lighted up with light that was not of this earth ". He was sent to study in Paris, where he preferred to

## SUBLIME FAILURES

learn a little German and less French. There he developed an attack of the calf-love, which is unto passion as chicken-pox unto the plague. In consequence he received an early but, as he believed, supernatural call to sing the sublimity of nuptial love. He referred afterwards to this source of inspiration as "the very first Angel", for his ascent to Parnassus was upon a veritable ladder of Angels.

Search for a profession led him at one time into the realm of Chemistry, and he discovered a Chloride of Bromine. Only after he had exhausted the prospects of Science and Holy Orders, did he turn to poetry. The great Reviews were in their heyday, and young poets were severely discouraged. *Blackwood's* remarked that Patmore's first efforts showed that "the slime of the Keatses and Shelleys had fecundated. His poetry cannot corrupt into anything worse than itself". Patmore's poetry was signed with initials, which were mistaken for a pen name of the young Tennyson. It is interesting to learn that at one time "Tennyson thinks that Patmore may surpass him". Tennyson was the elder, and Patmore was anxious to serve as a disciple of his plume. Their writing days were coeval, and lent themselves to contrast. Tennyson, suffering the loss of Hallam like an unstaunched wound, fell back on Patmore for solace. For a period of months they were blissfully companionate. Tennyson was destined for the worldly success which Patmore's poetry never attained.

Patmore's boyish buds were exhibited to Thackeray,

## COVENTRY PATMORE

who wrote of him as “ a clever young fellow who will be a genius one day ”. He forgot that genius is born while cleverness is instilled. Patmore believed that men of genius made their discoveries before they were twenty, and spent the rest of their lives describing them to the world. He had made a discovery too good to be true, and too simple for words : that in Marriage lay a new fount of song.

Patmore became soon aware of one of the commonest signs of genius : poverty. A patron was found in the beneficent Lord Houghton, and through the mystical channel of the Archbishop of Canterbury he was appointed to the British Museum. The avenue of a scholar’s life was opened to him at 23. It was lined as he estimated, by forty miles of book-shelves, of which he judged some forty feet contained the real literature of the world. It was a generous measure, which he reduced with the years. He found easy occasion to read some thousands of books, though unlike Arthur O’Shaughnessy, a fellow-drone in that papaverous hive, he was never eaten alive by worms nor did he allow the dust of books to choke his Castalian spring. Out of this giant waste-heap of the human mind two mighty spirits rose to influence him from the dead, Swedenborg and Saint Thomas Aquin. Of the mystic Swede he noted that he and Milton “ are far more profound on Love than Emerson. His irreligion ruins all ”. Also that “ modern metaphysicians have ignored feeling in treating of the laws of thought ”.

## SUBLIME FAILURES

The years passed in humble service to books, but not in solitude. Patmore married the daughter of a Dissenting Minister. She had prepared herself to know her lover better by committing his poems to memory. Even so, he was anxious to make a more impartial test, and asked her to mark the deserving passages in Emerson's Essays. Whether her choice was based on his previous pencillings or on her own perceptions, it coincided entirely with his own. He had been thinking of writing "the poem of the age". Under this new stimulus he began to write *The Angel in the House*. It came as near to being the poem of the Victorian age as any other. Slowly and sedately he began to chant the holy state of Matrimony to every mode of lute and lyre. He called upon the music of the spheres to enshrine common connubiality. It seemed humble fare for an Epic-monger. The firing of Troy, the slaying of the Blatant Beast, and the Loss of Paradise were fitter to lift their singers above the hum of the groundlings. Patmore tried to lift the heroine of his own domestic bliss to the side of Helen of Troy or the Faerie Queene. He did not notice that his theme afforded a butt more often pierced by the arrows of ridicule than of Cupid. He soon learnt to sustain the humorous shafts of critics. It was impossible for them not to make fun of "Dean Churchill" and his daughters, but he comforted himself by prophesying that Wordsworth would need two centuries to secure appreciation.

The field of letters was now his, and grew gravid

## COVENTRY PATMORE

with fruit, which his contemporaries seldom equalled in bouquet and never in purity of taste. It was a time of æsthetic striving and a group of devoted artists set out to paint as men painted before Raphael, and to write as they wrote poetry in the Middle Ages. Patmore classed the pre-Raphaelites as “pure-minded, ignorant, and confident”. Rossetti gave him an impression of “tensity rather than intensity”. Patmore prompted Ruskin to write the famous letter to *The Times* on behalf of the Brotherhood. He became a familiar of them. Woolner, a pre-Raphaelite sculptor, whose works have survived his name, made a medallion of Patmore. Millais, an Academical painter, whose name has survived his works, depicted Patmore’s married Angel. She survives there with hair parted clean over her forehead and brushed either side like a dark setting round a pale and slightly sphynx-like face. It was customary to grade an imaginary Tennysonian household. The author of the “Epic of Hades” was referred to as Tennyson’s “Butler”: Mrs. Hemans as his “Mistress”. Patmore for a period desired nothing better than to be his page. Mrs. Patmore seemed to be painted by Millais to be the housekeeper of Camelot. Woolner set her also in a medallion. The visible kink in her nose and the heavy-lidded eyes gave her a look of Savonarola in the appropriate Salvation Army dress. Though Patmore denied that she was “Honoria”, the Angel in the House, her cameo slipped into his lines:—

## SUBLIME FAILURES

“ In shape no slender Grace  
But Venus milder than the dove :  
Her mother’s air, her Norman face,  
Her large sweet eyes, clear lakes of love.”

Mrs. Patmore inspired one of Browning’s *Dramatis Personæ*, but she had claims to be included amongst authors herself. Under the name of “ Mrs. Motherly ” she published a book of children’s verse, and a severer volume called *The Servants’ Behaviour Book*, which was a great contrast to Swift’s memoranda on the subject. Her courage was recorded in once saving the lives of children by keeping a bull at bay with a lace parasol. She was also successful in keeping the lures of Rome from her husband. When Patmore was hard beset, the daughter of the Manse outargued or out-influenced Dr. Manning. But in 1862 she died, and Patmore was left, as Manning had been left, free to approach Catholic claims. Her pathetic last words were recorded : “ When I am gone, they will get you and I shall see you no more.” The poet passed to the Roman faith, but compromised delightfully with his loyalty by acclaiming her among the Saints of that Church, against which she had warned him in vain. As for his reasons, he once scribbled in a volume of Browning : “ What’s the use of argufying ? When all’s said I take to the Catholic religion rather than to Atheism or Protestantism as I take to ale rather than to porter or half-and-half because I like it better.”

## COVENTRY PATMORE

There was a glimpse at Manning in his etching of the Dean :—

“No change had touched Dean Churchill : kind  
By widowhood more than winter’s bent,  
And settled in a cheerful mind  
As still forecasting Heaven’s content.  
Well might his thoughts be fixed on high  
Now she was there.”

Patmore came to dislike Manning increasingly, and his *Biography* preserves the bitter dialogue between the Cardinal and a graceless priest, who had been reported to say that the greatest disaster to the Catholic Church in England was Mrs. Manning’s death ! “I hear,” said the Cardinal, “that you were sorry my wife died ?” “And weren’t you ?” was the unanswerable reply. No doubt, Manning kept his temper on a delicate subject. With Patmore there lingered a further delicacy, for he married as his second wife the lady whom Manning had been once expected to raise to the rank of Archdeaconess of Chichester. In those distant days Anglican clergymen generally visited maiden ladies for purposes of honourable courtship. But Manning had been in search of penitents, and his action was misinterpreted. Miss Marianne Byles followed Manning into the Church, but not into the religious life. When she married Patmore, Manning made known his disapproval of the remarriage of widowers. Patmore became a repository of malicious stories about Manning. On one occasion he found the letters,

## SUBLIME FAILURES

Manning wrote to his second wife, after her death. He sent them to Manning, and suggested he should select a few and return the rest. He added that he had not read them himself. The Cardinal replied that as they were spiritual letters written under the Seal he would keep them. Apparently he destroyed them all. Patmore's story was that, though he had not read them himself, his wife had read many to him, and he knew that they contained other than religious matter. The nature of that matter remained unsaid but it was enough to start the rumour, which the Cardinal denied so bitterly, that he had jilted his penitent in Anglican years. Patmore seems to have set a springe for the elusive ecclesiastic, and to have professed surprise when he carried away the trap. Between two such minds it is not for biographers to tread. Enough that the second Mrs. Patmore must have been out of the ordinary to interest two such rare men.

She was as artistic as a poet could have wished, so much so that her husband found it necessary to teach her to darn. It was indubitably a marriage of romance, and she brought him the wealth, which made him a country gentleman for a part of his life. Patmore wrote prettily to her in allusion to his first wife, as if she had been the *Honoria* of his Epic :—

“ I could not love thee, dear, so much  
Loved I not Honor more.”

His first wife had been buried in Hendon, then an

undisturbed suburban retreat. Aeroplanes had not yet come, nor could it be said that those who went to the cemetery learnt to fly, while those who learnt to fly went to the cemetery. A gulf has yawned between the generations. Emily Patmore knew her husband as well as she knew his poesy, for she left his wedding ring to his next wife. Her reward followed, for out of her grave soared the most poignant and most beautiful of his Odes, "The Azalea" and "Departure". These were Odes of unrelieved sorrow such as no English poet has ever had the lacerated courage to write about his dead. "Departure," with its haunting refrain: "It was not like your great and gracious ways" describes the very moment of his wife's death:—

" with huddled unintelligible phrase  
 and frightened eye,  
 and go your journey of all days  
 with not one kiss or a goodbye,  
 and the only loveless look the look with which you passed."

Few could bear to remember such an incident, and perhaps only Patmore dared to record it? His hand was like the hand of a surgeon embalming the woman he loved.

The "Azalea" was even more poignant. The widower had fallen asleep with a love-letter of his wife on his breast. Thinking for a moment that he only dreamed that she was dead, he woke in delicious consciousness that she was there beside him:—

## SUBLIME FAILURES

“ till 'gan to stir  
a dizzy somewhat, in my troubled head  
It was the azalea's breath and she was dead ! ”

A poem so exquisite and tremulous is like a paraphrase from one of those tiny poems of Japan, and as allusive as the prints of a lost bird upon the white snow. All the leisured surge of the Victorian poets, all the twinkling touches of the Impressionists have not equalled this handful of notes played upon the morning scent of an azalea.

The poem “Amelia” carried the agonies of widowerhood to the stage when the poet leads his second betrothed to the grave of the first. To make love to one woman beside the grave of another surpasses the sentimental power of most men. Yet it is vastly different from botanizing on a mother's grave. For Patmore it was an act sincere beyond sincerity. Its description in verse seems almost beyond accomplishment, but Patmore achieved the incredible thing :—

“ while therefore now  
Her pensive footsteps stirr'd  
The darnell'd garden of unheedful death,  
She asked what Millicent was like and heard  
Of eyes like hers and honeysuckle breath . . .  
And the tea-rose I gave  
To deck her breast, she dropp'd upon the grave.  
And this was hers, said I, decoring with a band  
Of mildest pearls Amelia's milder hand.  
Nay I will wear it for her sake she said :  
For dear to maidens are their rivals dead.”

## COVENTRY PATMORE

In “Tired Memory” he casts and recasts the prick of treason to his first wife until his brain grows “dead of devotion and tired memory”. It is a long and pathetic appeal to her forgiveness, and the last twenty-three lines were taken out of the published Odes. But the private copy runs :—

“ I wooed her with thy praises, and I won  
With protestations of my love for thee ;  
And, by her answering kindness for the name  
Of thee, her Rival, she became  
Thine own.  
Less kind than she couldst thou entreat her, dear,  
In thy expectant sphere,  
If loving thine and mine and thee and me.  
There 'twere adjudged her right with us to be ?  
Twain is the mind of love, ev'n as the mood  
Of stars in solitude.  
And yet the learned lonely watcher views  
A twofold, sometimes, or a triple star  
Strange in the crowd of shinings singular.  
But oh my Love,  
No more will I amuse  
My doubting heart with verse of vain excuse  
Let Holy Law the theme be of all Song  
And let the seldom and excepted case,  
If such it prove  
(That none my way misquoting travel wrong)  
Walk silent with veil'd face  
Contented best to be accounted base.”

The Odes appeared as follows: Nine in the privately circulated and destroyed edition of 1868; thirty-one in the edition of 1877, and forty-six in that

## SUBLIME FAILURES

of the following year. The political Ode called “1877” was not reprinted in 1878, or after.

Emily Patmore had left him a family of Victorian plenty. He was puzzled when to pet or punish, and his poem “The Toys”, consequent on the chiding of his son, is the favourite of English Anthologies. It represents the poet in the *Oxford Book of English Verse*. It is almost the only one of his Odes familiar to the reading world. Otherwise *The Unknown Eros*, into which he gathered them, has remained unknown still.

*The Angel in the House* was published in two parts : “The Betrothal” in 1854, and “The Espousals” two years later. The edition known to the public is the altered edition of 1857. Even the first and original draft in manuscript is very different from any printed version. This manuscript was given to Alice Meynell, and survives in the Greatham Library.

When this Matrimonial Epic was published, it secured a steadfast success of esteem rather than the devastation of a thunderbolt falling from the heights of song. It became the several delight of Emerson, Newman, Ruskin, and Carlyle. Tennyson solemnly ascribed to it “a fair chance of immortality”: though he described certain lines as “hammered up out of old nail heads”. Ruskin wrote of him as “the only living poet who always strengthens and purifies : the others sometimes darken and nearly always depress and discourage.” Carlyle, whose particular house-Angel was Jane Welsh, did not find

more than what was “ quaintly comfortable ” in the Poem. On the other hand, Aubrey de Vere, a celibate Catholic, and like most Catholics of the time more Victorian than the Victorians, was shocked by lines occurring in “ Faithful for Ever ”, the sequel to the Epic. He demanded they should be expunged. Patmore replied : “ When you are married, you will take a very different view of the passage.” Aubrey’s reply was uncompromising : “ If I thought that marriage would make me like that, I would vow to remain single.” In the end Patmore removed them. It was the first of his unnecessary sacrifices to prurient piety.

In spite of his success, no poet received warmer ridicule amongst the Victorians for the *Angel in the House*. When he was most praised, it was for the superficial and not for the quintessential in the poem. He had delivered his message upon a graceful and long-tailed kite. He must yet deliver it with burning arrows. The idea of passionate romance sheltering in the Close of Salisbury Cathedral seemed far-fetched. Old Sarum had been a jest in days of the Reform Bill, but deep is the transfiguration which can instil ideas into words. Sarum attached to a Rite had become the symbol of Young England embattled for Holy Church. Patmore now attempted to ring romantic peals from Salisbury spire amid the flight of Cupids, instead of pigeons. Patmore took little heed whether he evoked the ridiculous. To the unthinking, marriage is always Love reduced to the

## SUBLIME FAILURES

comic. The courtship of a Dean's daughter seemed humorous in the extreme. Reduced to verse, it promised a harvest of the quaint plants, which grow on the margin of the great lake of Bathos. Poets prefer to crown Love with the sanguine blooms of sin and sorrow. But Patmore, living between a suburban cottage and the British Museum, threw Cathedral courtship and wedded bliss upon the wings of soaring poetry. However genteel and trivial his feathers might seem, wistful wonders and mild ecstacies lay within reach of his flight. Where there was Love, he felt there could be nothing common or mean. His rosy-feathered arrow should prick the bubbles that rose out of bathetic waters.

Patmore was right, although the voluptuous writers accused him of a hundred such bubbles. Lust no doubt rings more resonant, but Passion outsings Lust and Love outsoars both in turn. The poet passed across the leaden waters of bathos without splashing his wings. He needed artistic restraint to sing the Song of Solomon in cadences suitable to the shadow of an English Cathedral. Poetical licence overcame the fact that the subject of his own courtship had been a daughter of vulgar Dissent. "Dean Churchill" was an aristocratic metamorph of his father-in-law arrayed in the likeness of Archdeacon Manning. In the end Patmore threw skyward an astonishing pile of ordered poetry as high and austere as the Spire protecting the Dean and his precious girls. It proved a revelation which was acceptable. Henceforth the daughters of

## COVENTRY PATMORE

the clergy and their swains could study a philosophy of Love. Dead vestal fires upon the cold altars of English Minsters began to exude frankincense. There were revealed hymeneal heights more staggering than the mediaeval statistics supplied by vergers.

At this time the path successful seemed to lie before Patmore. The poem was immensely admired, almost achieving popularity in England. In America it actually did. Strangely it became a best-read book in the Eldorado of Divorce, where the State of Matrimony is not always a united one. To Patmore, modern divorce would have appeared a tearing of the garment which is without seam. One of his aphorisms touches the question, and is not unconnected with the idea pervading the Poem :

“ Love is a recent discovery and requires a new law. Easy Divorce is the vulgar solution. The true solution is some undiscovered security for true marriage.” Some solution was necessary in the Patmorean Philosophy rather than that Love should be trampled by an inharmonious pair. The modern solution of marrying in haste and remarrying at leisure had not occurred even as a bad dream. His way of divorce was separation, which he approved in Coleridge’s case. His security for true marriage appeared in the mystical knowledge that it was a rehearsal of the divine conjunction between God and the Soul. Therefore it must not be too perfect. The perfect was reserved for the celestial marriage it portrayed. If it happened to be imperfect unto

## SUBLIME FAILURES

failure or folly, a pardonable separation was the open course.

The Poem instantly commanded and held a place amongst the longer pieces of the language, somewhere between those, which are so well known, that they are seldom read and those, which are little known but oftener perused. In America immense editions were sold, presumably to the newly-wed. They must have accomplished something to mitigate the disappointment attributed to American brides at the sight of Niagara Falls. *The Angel in the House* does not possess a magniloquence compared to that waterspout channelled in a chasm, but it may prove more lasting. The Falls will eat themselves back into the great Lakes and, though English be a dead tongue by then, the guardians of the classical will preserve his Epic as a ladder upon which angels may continue to pass from earthly to celestial things.

The Poem was regarded like a piece of pre-Raphaelite tapestry, which it was fashionable to leave in the drawing-room. But the brethren of that school knew its inner worth. They loved the minutiae and detail in the fine-spun web. The maze of quiet domesticities and homely heart-beats invited the pen of the ready mocker. The familiar rhymes, the compression of lines into their verbal atoms and the guarded theme of Matrimony seemed a humdrum treatment for the Divine Art. Swinburne, who himself was incapable of love, sacred or profane, produced a parody. To Patmoreans it was as profane as a comic

version of the Prayer Book. After a period of immense vogue the Poem was allowed to fall into oblivion. After a perspective of half a century the *Cambridge History of English Literature* was unable to say more than that "it may be said to be a kind of half-conscious, half-unconscious revolt against both Tennyson and Browning". If the alleged revolt was half-conscious, it was presumably also half-unconscious. Whether it was a revolt against the great twin brethren of Victorian verse, it was more likely a challenge to Rossetti.

The Rossettis had been amongst Patmore's intimates in the spring of life, but according to William Rossetti they had "rare intercourse" in after-times. Dante Gabriel wrote with coolness: "You asked me how I liked the *Angel in the House*? Of course it is very good indeed, but will one ever want to read it again?" Coolness was met with bitterness. Patmore had a message he accounted divine and poets, who were not with him, seemed against. He believed that Rossetti had deliberately withheld his exquisite powers from enlarging upon the most exquisite of themes. He saw worse than "serious artistic faults". His whole treatment of his Blessed Damosel was bringing an Angel to earth earthy. Rossetti had turned aside from being what he might have been, the Laureate of the Virgin Mary. He might have built her a *turris eburnea*, a Tower of Ivory, but he had preferred to write a "House of Life" that had no celestial counterpart. Patmore's Essays on Rossetti and

## SUBLIME FAILURES

Swinburne show the extent of his reserved depreciation. His tract on Swinburne was omitted from his later volume called *Principle in Art*.

Patmore found himself following a lonely groove, and was prepared to move apart from the general advance upon Helicon. He completed the *Angel in the House* by the addition of two books written in the astonishing form of rhyming, but lyrical, letters in the Post. The books were entitled *Faithful for Ever* and *The Victories of Love*. They include a Wedding Sermon in which Patmore preached his full doctrine. Though he held his road of "sparkling humilities" without wavering, there are passages of perfection and couplets in which skill and observation meet. To show how Love can conquer even a loss of aspirates he writes :—

"H is her Shibboleth. 'Tis said  
Her Mother was a Kitchen Maid."

But the exquisite lowliness of her heart leads to a famous quatrain. She can never forget that her husband was once refused in marriage by the heroine of the whole poem :—

"I wish he had that fancied Wife  
With me for maid, now ! all my life  
To dress her out for him and make  
Her looks the lovelier for his sake."

He could read the secrets in a woman's heart, which was closed to Swinburne for all his play of passion.

A stray scrap on Swinburne and his Gallic

## COVENTRY PATMORE

idol Victor Hugo shows where his antipathy lay : “ They burn their powder in a dish instead of a gun barrel, and the result is much flame but little force. They look upon the truths of the Universe not as a master to be diligently served and adored, nor even as a wife to be reverently loved and faithfully cherished, but as a mistress for passions and passing embraces, unumbered and unsanctioned by obligations. The prayer of the good artist as well as the good man is : Order all things in me strongly and sweetly from end to end. Their liberty is the liberty of escape and not of submission.”

If *The Angel in the House* was a throwing of his lady’s glove into the arena, the day came when Patmore cast his Odes like a burnished gauntlet to the “ fleshly school of poetry ”. He waited a day when he might advance with lance in hand and a mystical oriflamme floating round his metrical armour. But if he awaited the cries of the public to proceed, he waited long, and he waited in vain. To the fashionable critic, who awards the scales according to the breath of the general reader, he presented singular failure compared to Tennyson and Browning. While these ran alternately first and second with a minor host behind, of Patmore there was nothing to be said more than “ also sang ”. For all his close-packed lines and shining epithets he did not walk with the Laureate upon the heights. His poetry like his friendship had drifted from Tennyson with the years. It was a tragedy in a way, and their biographers

## SUBLIME FAILURES

say as little conveniently as possible. The young Tennyson once accepted cronyship passing into hero-worship from the younger Patmore. They shared a fifth sense in adjusting words. For them the perfect epithet was no use unless it was set in the perfect line. An imperfect line lay on Patmore's conscience like a sin. They respected each other as a final Court of Appeal. Ruskin comparing them said that Patmore had "neither the lusciousness nor the sublimity of Tennyson, but clearer and finer habitual expressions and more accurate, though Tennyson is often quite sinfully hazy". The breach in their friendship is mysterious. It was not through jealousy of similar aims. It lay rather in the difference between the poles they sought. Patmore had decided to write with and for the elect. He became and remained a poet's poet. Tennyson had begun his sonorous appeal to the middle classes and the Royal Family. Patmore stepped out of the adulation, which surrounded Tennyson like a trailing halo. He even dared to be critical. He not only suggested but persuaded the reluctant Tennyson into a belief that Burns was a greater poet than Tennyson. This was not the true attitude of a friend or disciple.

Then Patmore had secret cause of irritation. Certain lines from his proofs he believed had been stealthily used by Tennyson and Swinburne, and he wrote an autograph note to the Ode "To the Body": "The proofs of the additional sixteen Odes were in print and in the hands of many of my friends, Lord

## COVENTRY PATMORE

Houghton, Mr. Monteith, A. de Vere, Woolner, etc., about twelve months before their publication in the second edition of *Eros*. Just before their publication a volume of Mr. Swinburne appeared with these lines in it :—

‘God’s little pleasure house  
For him and for his spouse.’

“About the same time in a volume by Lord Tennyson appeared the expression ‘with snow in lieu of lilies’: my ‘who left the lilies in her body’s lieu’ (*Child’s Purchase*) was in print and private circulation many months before.” The theft by Swinburne was just as flagrant, for Patmore had written :—

“Little sequestered pleasure house  
For God and for His Spouse.”

But theirs had been a great friendship in their day, and on a celebrated occasion Tennyson sent his friend to his old lodging in search of a manuscript, described as “like a butcher’s account book”. In spite of the landlady’s assertions that there was no such thing, the missing masterpiece was found amid her tea and sugar. A more convenient direction for its recovery might have been the label. It was the script of *In Memoriam*. And here it may be stated that Patmore was the allusion in the famous lines :—

“I hold it true with one who sings  
To one clear harp in divers tones  
That men may rise on stepping stones  
Of their dead selves to higher things.”

## SUBLIME FAILURES

Here was enshrined an acknowledged echo of Patmore's verses :—

“ As one dead joy appears  
The platform of some better hope.”

Friendship was severed by general decline rather than by precipitated act. Tennyson could not accept friendship which was not cemented by flattery. Patmore was too keen a critic, a literary hedgehog armed with prickles at every point. He declared that *In Memoriam* and *Maud* were poor poems though containing exquisite beauty. Later poems of the bard he dismissed with the subcontemptuous epithet of “ Tennysonian ”. Criticism of the pen passed to bitterness of words. When Edmund Gosse complained that Tennyson had extorted a fee of £150 for a single song called “ The Throstle ” (which might have been written by any High School Mistress) Patmore remarked with fervour that he would not have written the poem for twice as much ! It was an acme of acidity ! A mischievous fairy seems to have changed the themes of the two poets while they slept. The subjects of Patmore's Epic : Salisbury Cathedral and the daughters of Sarum's Dean were quintessentially Tennysonian. The Holy Grail and the Arthurian Legend should have inflamed Patmore's religious mysticism rather than Tennyson's courtly Idylls. In point of fact Patmore declined the theme of King Arthur in *The Angel in the House*.

It is probable that Patmore's change of Creed made

## COVENTRY PATMORE

a gulf even between poets in those days. Though both poets had flighted above their peers, they were never able to meet or enjoy communion upon the heights. In early days they had meant much to each other, but in crustier days reconciliation was vain. Patmore once wrote a letter of full explanation in his wish to smooth relations. He protested that he had been grievously hurt by Mrs. Tennyson, who, while his first wife was lying dead in the house, had sent round a memorial for the poet's relief, a wounding form of charity which he had declined. Patmore's estrangement had grown out of this lapse of tact. Tennyson's answer was so frigid that it was clear that, when friendship dies, even the weeds wither upon the grave.

Tennyson disapproved of Patmore as an independent critic and too unpopular a poet, to be admissible as a satellite in a Tennysonian solar system. At the end Patmore missed Tennyson's funeral service in the Abbey by one of those misunderstandings which are clearer than understanding itself. As a result of the Laureate's disapproval, Patmore was accorded the barest mention in the *Life*, which filial piety erected amid the hush of readers and libraries to the dead bard. But let one moment of their friendship be recorded from the fifties, when these eaglets of British song climbed the Old Man at Coniston together and became gloriously drunk with spiritous liquors. As Patmore recorded, they descended the mountain together "charioted by Bacchus and his pards six

## SUBLIME FAILURES

faster than we had ascended". It is a pleasant thought to think that Tennyson was once as drunk as a lord, and that Patmore could be inebriated with wine as well as with woman and song.

The orthodox disapproval recurs in Mr. Saintsbury's contribution to the *Cambridge History of English Literature*. Compared to the large space accorded to inferior poets, Coventry Patmore is suffered only a grudging praise, and even his little public exaltation set down to "coterie admiration". As an example of the depth to which unworthy criticism can descend, only two lines of Patmore are quoted :—

" Our witnesses the cook and groom  
We signed the lease for seven years more "

apparently to give point to the comment that "as Patmore has seldom fallen into actual silliness, so he rarely rose to actual sublimity". But for critics and criticism he happily had only an uproarious contempt. His was a savage indifference when faced by inanity or reptiliar prejudices. Once and for ever he had sung his careless palinode to Truth whether in Philosophy or Letters :—

" For want of me the world's course will not fail :  
When all its work is done, the lie shall rot ;  
The Truth is great and shall prevail,  
When none cares whether it prevail or not."

The second Mrs. Patmore turned out, to his unwitting shame and annoyance, to be an heiress.

## COVENTRY PATMORE

There was nothing to be done but to make the best of it. There had been many mansions in his home. He had lived at Finchley and at Hampstead before he bought and named Heron's Gyll in Sussex, which the natives transposed too easily to Herring's Gill ! His intense Conservatism imbued him with ambition to be a country gentleman of England at a time when it was difficult to break into County circles. He had prepared his way by verse :—

“ There lies the lovely land I know,  
Where men and women lordliest grow ;  
There peep the roofs where more than kings  
Postpone state cares to country things,  
There curls the wanton cottage smoke  
Of him that drives but bears no yoke,  
There laughs the realm where low and high  
Are lieges to society . . . ”

Here Patmore made stately improvements and employed himself as his own architect. There was no knowing where so vital and versatile a genius would display itself. He became an amateur maker of fireworks, and once astounded the local Protestants by building the finest Guy known in the locality. Protestants still believed that the unfortunate Fawkes of November memory was a dear emblem of Catholic and Apostolic worship.

The purchase of Sussex acres was part of his shining Toryism. The amazing thing is that the magnificent Odes, which began to crown his life by appearing in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, were spattered with flecks from

## SUBLIME FAILURES

the bit, which contemporary Liberalism thrust into his fine Tory jaws. Amid Odes proclaiming his most mystical message appeared poems ominously labelled “1867” and “1877”. The latter was not reprinted from the edition of that date, but a poem marked “1880-1885” took its place in the final editions, though the first title “The Merry Murder”, was omitted. As a specimen of political rancour, “1877” follows hereby:—

“‘ Go up thou Bald-pate ! ’ (hark the Children say) :  
The dyke-vexed waters, now the dyke is riven,  
How harmlessly they play,  
Caressing yon loose raft that swims their way !  
Those garrulous clans, before the bright gale driven,  
How orderly they troop across the sandy bay !

Wait, Children, till they reach  
The check that bids them stay,  
Heaping their hearts there at the beck of the Moon  
As they will soon.  
What makes that sudden uproar on the beach ?  
What from the blasted sea-wall spits at Heaven ? ”

The Bald-pate is presumably the Tory seer, the dyke is the limited Franchise, the garrulous clans are the voters, and the rest reads like modern history. Patmore’s feelings were archaic and indescribable when the Liberals threw down dyke and bulwark. Nor did he spare the Conservatives. It is permissible to imagine that his behaviour, if he returned to the Carlton Club, would be as impulsive as the Saviour in clearing out the Temple. The selling of doves in the

## COVENTRY PATMORE

Sanctuary would symbolize the selling of principles which was already rife in the party, Patmore had chosen as the tide-break. When Disraeli disfranchised the Upper and Middle Classes, upon whom Tory government rested immemorially, one voice at least was raised against his Reform Bill in 1867 :—

“ In the year of the great crime  
When the false English nobles and their Jew  
By God demented slew  
The trust they stood twice-pledged to keep from wrong.”

Patmore revelled in his country estate. He took to quarrying stone and breeding trout. He sallied forth to encounter poachers, the traditional foes of country gentlemen, armed with the traditional horse-pistols. His grass lawns were designed upon principles taken from the Parthenon, for he had discovered that there are no true horizontals in architecture. From experience he confirmed the strange rumour of Isaac Walton that a frog would scratch out a pike’s eye with its implanted elbows. As a loving wood-reeve, he protested against the ignorant legislation permitting the destruction of English timber. The beauties and splendours of Nature were never lost to him. Occasionally he set down such a description of the Northern Lights as this :—

“ I have twice seen the ghostly quivering splendour arching the South instead of the North. The show began in the North with a fine eruption of blue and red shafts radiating from a low arch of darkness. In about half an hour the entire sky became one huge tent of quivering crimson flame with the exception

## SUBLIME FAILURES

of a little black circlet right overhead from which the light all flowed like a veil from a diadem. The lustre was so great that everything in the near landscape could be clearly seen and the chain of ponds looked just like great pools of blood."

Compare with this prose lyric the miraculous detail with which he described Dawn in Canto X of *The Angel in the House* : a Canto perhaps neglected owing to its forbidding title "Going to Church". Few poets have found deeper inspiration earlier in the morning :—

" The air  
Was dark and sharp ; the roosted birds  
Cheep'd, Here am I, Sweet ; are you there ?  
On Avon's misty flats the herds  
Expected comfortless the day  
Which slowly fired the clouds above ;  
The cock screamed, somewhere far away ;  
In sleep the matrimonial dove  
Was brooding ; no wind waked the wood,  
Nor moved the midnight river-damps,  
Nor thrilled the poplar, quiet stood  
The Chestnut with its thousand lamps ;  
The moon shone yet, but weak and drear,  
And seemed to watch, with bated breath,  
The landscape, all made sharp and clear  
By stillness, as a face by death."

If an English dawn has been better described in English verse, it has, like this piece, escaped the makers of Anthology.

Heron's Gyll was sold at a profit to the Duke of Norfolk. Patmore's elation at a poet's business success found vent in a pamphlet, " How I Managed

## COVENTRY PATMORE

and Improved my Estate," which landowners will find full of well-observed hints. He passed residence to the old Mansion at Hastings, which he had seen from the road and loved as a boy. In the garden at Hastings he encouraged his youngest son in the paths of sport by urging him to fire with a gun into dark corners which he had strewn previously with game from the poulters. The historical feeling was stimulated by burying old coins for his son to dig up and discover as a highwayman's hoard. Here he grew crusted and petrified, yet kept the divine fire smouldering within. The Troubadour of St. Mary had become a fine old English gentleman as naturally as he had gravitated to the most fossil of Christian Churches. Patmore was always a politician, and his outbursts are traceable over half a century. His execrations of Gladstone and Disraeli were not sudden spasms. He was a consistent mediaeval Tory.

Strangely enough it was a spark from Patmore's pen which had given the impulse to the much-mocked legionaries, the British Volunteers. As far back as 1851, a letter reached *The Times* from amongst the shelves of the British Museum, suggesting their embodiment. The Government refused permission, but commenced the movement a year later as an original and happy thought of their own. The Volunteers began as a hostile gesture to France, although their Territorial descendants perished in her defence. Patmore shared Carlyle's dislike of that sceptical nation, and in 1870 he sided like most

## SUBLIME FAILURES

English writers with Germany. But reading one of the fatuous telegrams of the old Kaiser, he was inspired to write what he described as his only popular poem in contrast to the rest of his verse :—

“ This is to say, my dear Augusta,  
We've had another awful buster :  
Ten thousand Frenchmen sent below  
Praise God from Whom all blessings flow.”

Within sound of wind and wave at Hastings, he found that “ the burning questions of the day do not burn us ”. Here he could exult in the only musical instrument worthy of a great poet, a great storm at sea : “ hearing the winds their Maker magnify ”. He was the glowing auditor of several oratorios of the deep, when waves poured through the Hastings streets. It was after one of these storms that he saved the projections of the East Cliff from the pick of the navvy. Here in old Hastings he built his church to Saint Mary Star of the Sea, endowing the chantry for his second wife's soul. He intended that it should be the only modern Catholic Church without bad taste. He built a fine fabric with a triple-vaulted roof of stone at his own cost : and the Pious Society of Missions, who were in charge, were left to provide the fittings. Patmore wrote : “ There is no debt on the property as it stands. That it should be so I made a condition of my gift.” Unhappily, the Pious Society with pious simplicity raised their share of the funds by mortgaging Patmore's. At the last moment he discovered that the provision he had made

## COVENTRY PATMORE

for his wife's soul had been pawned and could possibly be alienated. His fury was righteous altogether. Whether the Pious Society had acted under the laws of necessity or of the Church, Patmore was never reconciled. He lost interest in Hastings, and eventually, when the lease of the Mansion expired, retired to Lymington beyond the Solent. Henceforth his caustic wit never spared the clergy. He once made a laughing distinction between the heathen and the Catholic: that the former have Grace without the Sacraments, and the latter the Sacraments without Grace! When a Catholic Church was burned down, he calmly pretended that the clergy had burnt it for the insurance !

So much for Old Hastings, then a fishing village of narrow streets, surrounded by old gardened houses, but now all swallowed in the distended boarding population of the South Coast. No one asks whether the mortgage on the soul of Mrs. Patmore was ever redeemed. Haply her husband's poetry has succoured her in another world as much as many Masses. God could hardly be as ungrateful as Mr. Saintsbury for the Odes. The Pious Society of Missions continued to minister to the Star of the Sea, though ivy now grows over the lovely west window. The name of the poet is forgotten. Even on days of storm, when trippers are driven like wet starlings under cover, none recall him swaying with indignant and transfigured face against the gale.

When Swinburne parodied *The Angel in the House*,

## SUBLIME FAILURES

he parried the obvious reply by parodying himself. Patmore's answer was sublime. He wrote Odes which defy parody. Rather than descend to Swinburne's level, he soared where he could not be followed. The flaming content of Patmore's "Unknown Eros" left Swinburne panting in his gilded brothel. These Odes revealed an erotic mysticism, which many passages in the "Victories of Love" had foreshadowed, and which lay like flower-seed in the crannies of the House Angelical. Though that poem was a sexual poem, it bore the hall-mark of respectable. The canonical rape of a Dean's daughter was not such as hints sublimity. The theme of wedded love cannot escape the slightly laughable. Wedlock is little less than the absurd volatilized by sex, unless it can be raised to a Sacrament. Patmore was searching for transcendent values. He found himself between those who mock and those who are shocked. He insisted that wedded virginity glowed the brighter behind the bars of the bridal bed. In the eyes of God the Creator or of the creative poet nothing is purer than "pure sex". Hence the flaming Odes with all they symbolized or portrayed. At a swift swoop Patmore made himself the companion of Saint Teresa and all the mystics, who have believed that God could be infatuated for love of their souls.

Patmore had been apprehensive of passages in his earlier work. After his reception into the Catholic Church, he was anxious to destroy whatever was inaccordant with the Council of Trent. The great

## COVENTRY PATMORE

theologian Cardinal Franzelin was asked whether it lay inside Catholic theology to symbolize the union of God and the soul by sex. Rather startlingly he replied that such teaching was Catholicism itself. Patmore emphrased it as "the burning heart of the Universe". So *The Angel in the House* passed the censor of orthodox mysticism. As Mrs. Meynell wrote: "It is in a fine defiance of the Philistine and of the superior person that Coventry Patmore assigned his wise, wild, remote, and most beautiful subtle thoughts to a Dean in a Cathedral pulpit." Few readers suspected the humdrum Poem could carry such fire until they had seen the fire ascend in the great Odes. As was well said: "it was as though a pre-Raphaelite should begin to paint like Rembrandt."

The Odes are best treated as the sequel of *The Angel in the House*. No poet ever uttered such poignant memories of a dead wife. No mediaeval mystic had written more intimately of the living soul. They showed his power to turn "the formless blaze of mystic doctrine into human words of honied peace". To compass their span, the poet read Theology for four hours a day during successive months. He described the process as "living on brandy and soda water" compared to literary indulgence on "the roast beef of Shakespeare". He realized the mightiness of his theme. Theology, which can be described as Reason applied to the unreasonable, is as difficult a tight-rope to poets as to preachers. Theologians proceed in perfect logic from their great

## SUBLIME FAILURES

illogical beginning. The descent of God into flesh is the first step in Catholic religion, an idea as incredible in beauty as in daring. It would have been simpler to have added Christ to the goodly fellowship of the Prophets. To make Him the end of Prophecy itself required the touch of a poet's wand. That the Creator used the channels of creation to beget Himself upon the blissful Virgin was beyond even the imagination of poets. All that Patmore dared was to follow upward as best he could.

Everything fitted in his synthesis. Marriage and Mary, wife and woman formed his constellation. The feminine body, hitherto despised as an Oriental pleasure-palace, became the subject of mystical veneration. It was like Patmore to erase Balsac's fulsome words in *Eugenie Grandet* : “*plus chaste que ne l’était la Vierge Marie elle-même.*” In this spirit he turned to write of the marriage of the Blessed Virgin : “groping to find if there lies any unsuspected pass between seemingly insuperable heights.”

Hence the analogies he tried to weave across the gulf between human and divine love. When he trod upon air so thin and rare, he could afford to be careless of his footprints. Once again he found himself disturbing the worthy Aubrey de Vere, who had thought Patmore too timid in pre-Catholic days. He was now urging his convert to suppress such odes as “*Eros and Psyche*” and “*De Natura Deorum*” with their exquisite implications between sex and the soul. Patmore used the drapery of pagan names to

COVENTRY PATMORE

cover a religious nakedness. Psyche he took as a symbol of the Virgin and of every God-kissed soul. Eros becomes the divine Lover who cries :—

“ O mortal, by Immortals’ cunning led  
Who shewd you how for Gods to bait your bed ? ”

And again to soothe her delighted terror :—

“ Leaps what sweet pain ?  
A fiend, my Psyche, comes with barren bliss  
A God’s embraces never are in vain.”

The soul, amazed, utters her little *Magnificat* :—

“ A God to make me nothing, needful to his bliss,  
And humbly wait my favour for a kiss ! ”

Caught upon her maiden bed, what can she do or say ?

“ ’Tis hard for fly, in such a honied flood,  
To use her eyes, far more her wings or feet.  
Bitter be thy behests !  
Lie like a bunch of myrrh between my aching breasts.”

The same theme is relentlessly pursued in the “ *De Natura Deorum* ”. When the Pythoness speaks with Psyche, she symbolizes the Archangel speaking to Mary or the Divine Lover to the soul :—

“ O Pythoness, to strangest story hark,  
A dreadful God was with me in the dark . . .  
He’s not with thee  
At all less wise nor more (the Pythoness replies)  
Than human lover is with her he deigns to adore.  
He finds a fair capacity  
And fills it with himself and glad would die  
For that sole She . . .  
The Immortals, Psyche, moulded men from sods  
That maids from them might learn the ways of Gods.”

## SUBLIME FAILURES

It would have been harder for Cardinal Franzelin to find the Catholic doctrine in the Odes, but for mystic eyes it was there. With the innocence of realism or the subtlety of the spiritual, Patmore contrived to combine Catholic and erotic in his verse. Sooner or later he was bound to touch the verge of verbal difficulties. While he wrote in poetry, there was little chance of being misunderstood by a public, who could not understand poetry at all. The English reader could not distinguish a Swinburne from a Patmore. Fortunately for both, metres have a fig-leaf effect on the British mind, and Patmore's nervous friends found themselves "frequently cheated of timorous anticipations". A very little poetry covers what becomes perilous in prose.

As Patmore lived longer by the sea, his poetical pulse seemed to die down slowly under the counter-rythm of the tides. He exhausted himself in each of his great Odes. As though he crammed all his powder into each rocket with devastating effect. He turned to prepare an essay in prose on "the relation of the soul to Christ as his betrothed wife". Into this mysterious volume, for there is no one living who has read it, he spaced the frenzy of his soul and of his heart. Perhaps he did not distinguish between what is heavenly upon earth and what cometh out of Heaven unto earth. The book was entitled *Sponsa Dei*, "the work of ten years continual meditations." This treasure-house of love and thought was shown to the exquisite Father Gerard Hopkins,

## COVENTRY PATMORE

who although a Jesuit was a poet. He hinted that such a treatise was “telling secrets”. The phrase entered Patmore’s soul like a barb. If a priest may never tell the secrets of the confessional, should a poet reveal the closer secrets of God? Did he fear the vulgar comment or respect the Jesuit’s finer sense? Perhaps, as a line says in the *Odes*, “lest shameless men cry shame” he burnt it. Richard Garnett says, “in reality no doubt because he had failed to satisfy himself and partly perhaps from apprehension of censure in his own communion.” In the opinion of his son Francis he “carried this idea of the soul as the Bride of Christ to very extreme lengths, and to say all that he wished to in prose might well have shocked the simple-minded. It was to this aspect that Hopkins objected”.

Rossetti, under an influence no less fierce, had buried the manuscript of the “House of Life” under his dead wife’s hair. Rossetti at least chanced a resurrection for his masterpiece. But the destroying tongues allowed no literary Orpheus to descend amongst the dead to reverse Patmore’s decision. The *Sponsa Dei* was consumed as utterly as the soul, which becomes the Spouse of God Himself. It can only be hoped that its thought may be traced in the prose of *Rod, Root, and Flower*, which he said had taken him all his life to write.

Father Hopkins wrote afterwards that his objections had only been offered as considerations. But Patmore had admitted him as his elect critic. It was Hopkins,

## SUBLIME FAILURES

who found the Odes “as dangerous to critics as the Canticles”. The Fathers of the Church had braved the opinion of Man when they kept the Song of Solomon in Holy Writ. Later the Church seemed to dare God Himself when she made human marriage a Sacrament on the level with the Eucharist. Patmore transposed the idea by making the human soul swoon in the marital bed of God. This no doubt was clear to Gerard Hopkins, who laid a warning finger on his lips. Hopkins had written of *The Angel in the House* that “to have criticized it looks now like meddling with the altar vessels. Yet they too are burnished with wash-leather”.

The loss of *Sponsa Dei* was serious. His prose was more intelligible to readers than his Odes, and his failure to be famously known (he might have been placed on the shelf between the Symposium of Plato and the Song of Songs) may have been due to his destroying act. Echoes and fragments can be traced in his Essays on *Dieu et ma Dame* and *The Precursor*. In the latter he made John Baptist the symbol of the natural, while John the Divine typified supernatural love. A skeleton taken from some of his paragraphs shows their tendency :—

“ The doctrine of election has its lively image in the way of a man with a maid . . . the Divine Love knows well that He must desire her . . . *Rex concupiscat decorum tuam* . . . she delights in calling herself His slave. He delights in being hers . . . these two captivities constitute one freedom . . . none save God can die and yet live for her . . . when God makes

## COVENTRY PATMORE

Himself as wine to the Beloved like the fabled Bacchus, the one thing he resents is inattention, and when she has fallen into this offence she has to recover her favour with Him by tears and prayers.”

Search for traces of the lost masterpiece led to the discovery of manuscript fragments, which could hardly have been contained elsewhere :—

“ She is the new Eve, the mother of all living through our participation of the Body of Christ, which is her body no less because it is become His.”

“ *Dieu et ma Dame* is the motto of the Knights of the Cross, of those who by long, absolute and painful obedience oped the bosom like a blissful wife to the husband of all life. They have become partakers according to His promise of his own nature, being habitually filled with the Holy Spirit, which is declared by the Church to be the embrace of the Divine Love and the Divine Truth, of which three persons, the duality of the sexes and their synthesis in mutual possession, natural love is the ultimate and sensible shape.”

“ When he withdraws from her, she becomes as the sheath of a lost sword or the cast skin of a serpent or as the wretched Hermit Crab, which has parted from her house and body, and she is His, and wanders cold, uncomely and exposed to all the external evils from which He is her strong and tender protection.”

The Psyche series was unique in English poetry. In *Psyche's Discontent* the relations of Soul and Lover, Virgin and God, were perfectly contained in the quatrain :—

“ Have pity of my clay-conceived birth  
 And maiden's simple mood,  
 Which longs for ether and infinitude  
 As thou, being God, crav'st littleness and earth.”

## SUBLIME FAILURES

Once the twin desire was admitted between them, the most simple and realistic metaphor described the divine possession, whether the beloved was filled with her Lover "as the cocoon is with the butterfly" or like :—

" the cup the Child scoops in the sand  
Fills and is part and parcel of the Sea."

or whether

" possessed I am with Thee  
Even as a sponge is by a surge of the sea ! "

He was divided between enouncing his message and the fear of making it too clear. As he wrote confidingly to another poet, Francis Thompson : " Two readings leave your poem very obscure in parts, but not perhaps more obscure than Prophecy should be. I am too concrete and intelligible. I fear greatly lest what I have written may not do more harm than good by exposing divine realities to profane apprehensions."

In delivering his message, Patmore realized that there can be wise and foolish poets, and that the theme needed exquisite circumspection. This appears in two unpublished letters he wrote to Mrs. Meynell, who had sent him a book by a modern writer :—

(*2nd March, 1896.*) "Amphion would never have raised cities and tamed savages had he used marrow bones and cleavers instead of his lute. There is nothing which cannot be beautifully and effectively said by a wise singer : there is no wisdom which cannot be made ridiculous and repulsive by a foolish one."

## COVENTRY PATMORE

(9th March, 1896.) "What is true in Mr. Platt's book is perfectly well known and acknowledged by tens of thousands of men and women who refuse to desecrate, by profanely shouting them, the realities which Angels will do no more than whisper to souls of proved purity. The theologians, responding therein to truly human instincts, maintain that there is no nakedness in Heaven; and everyone knows that beautiful veils emphasize instead of hiding the secrets of beauty. I in my poor way, in my poetry have said all and more than all Mr. Platt has said, far more effectively and emphatically for not having—

plucked the blushing petals off  
to find the secret of the rose.

Such writing will do nothing but put back indefinitely that day of purity of which they so ignorantly and indecently hail the dawn. One thing has happened more than once before in history. The art and imprudent speech of the time of the Renaissance is responsible for Puritanism; and I think I already see the signs of a new Puritanism which will be only not worse than the new 'Purity' which to some people is scarcely distinguishable from prurience."

No doubt symbolism led him into a rich mine of double meanings. The swooning rape of wedded womankind became akin to the rapture of the Saints. Even the taking of Ganymede was made to prefigure the bodily Assumption of the Virgin. He once said that the Venus of Milo was as susceptible of Catholic imagery as the Sistine Madonna. At home he mingled the Dresden Virgin with marbles of the Parthenon. Every Cathedral given to the Virgin became Parthenon by her very name. In sum, he wrote his Odes in the *vice versa* of the Song of Songs. That splendour

## SUBLIME FAILURES

of lovesick passion, without which the Bible would not be the Book of Books, is devoted to a natural love, which the commentators have hastily compared to a prevision of Christ's nuptials with His Church. Well and good. Patmore carried out the reverse by throwing the ecstatic union of God with the Soul into terms of bodily love. The *Magnificat* could only mean to Patmore that the same "great things" that were done unto the Virgin were done unto all souls that fear God. To discern the Lord's Body meant "the soul to be changed into an inconceivably lovely little goddess worthy to be a *Sponsa Dei*". His aphorism that the Virgin allows her love and beauty to become the ally and thrall of the body was no doubt another spark from the burnt manuscript, whose title still crowns one of the Odes:—

"What if this lady be thy soul and He  
Who claims to enjoy her sacred beauty, be  
Not thou but God . . ."

In his culminating Ode, "The Child's Purchase," the poet's flame seemed to rise and lick the very starlight upon which the Virgin trod.

"Desire of Him, whom all things else desire:  
Bush aye with Him as He with Thee on fire."

The same Ode touched heights which seemed too remote to be possible. The Virgin is imagined as possessed by God the Father and yet crucified with God the Son in one poignant imagery as though bliss and pain can no more be severed than Persons in the Trinity from each other.

## COVENTRY PATMORE

“ On His sweet fearful bed  
Rocked by an earthquake, curtained with eclipse  
Thou sharest the rapture of the sharp spear’s head.”

In the first edition “ spousal ” preceded rapture. Patmore had the mysticism of the mediaevals which did not fear to compare the Virgin or the favoured soul to the beloved of God. Words, which he made hers, run as daring as lovingly :—

“ I cannot guess the good that I desire . . .  
I love Thee, God : yea and 'twas such assault  
As this which made me thine : if that be fault :  
But I, thy Mistress, merit should thine ire  
If aught so little, transitory and low  
As this which made me thine  
Should hold me so.”

Patmore made the act of marriagehood the rehearsal of the unison between God and the soul. He returned to the same symbols again and again, whether it was Eros and Psyche or Jove and Semele or the Trinitarian Spouse of the Virgin. He would have nothing of Puritan and prudish peoples, who see her as a stumbling block. He pleaded in one of his paradoxes that the pagan, initiated into the names of Bacchus and Persephone, knew more of Christian doctrine than the Christian, who refused to call Mary the Mother of God.

The conclusion of the matter was this, that Patmore saved human marriage from being ridiculous. No doubt the acts, which mankind share with the animals are considered comic or at best utilitarian and hygienic.

## SUBLIME FAILURES

Patmore staked his philosophy on their being godlike. It was not only the way of a man with a maid, but the way of God Himself with the soul and the whole Universe. The Creator had created it that he might take his pleasure therein. Religious people might be shocked, but Patmore left them with a dilemma, which they could either take or leave. The act of fruition between men and women must be either reflective of the animals or symbolical of God. Patmore's only concession was to keep his symbolism to the path of wedded love. Since the Church made it a Sacrament, Patmore took her at her word.

He never apologized for his Odes. Although more glaring or glowing, the *Sponsa Dei* could only have been the Odes in a superlative degree. He made no *apologia* for writing nor for burning it. He kept the path he had made for himself regardless of public taste or private praise. For him the *Te Deum laudamus* was not antithesis but antiphon to *Laus Veneris*. The praise of Venus was Swinburne's greatest effort, but like Rossetti, he had failed to go far enough and lift the sensual into the supra-sensual. Swinburne stated a great and earthly truth in his poem, but when analysed, it conveyed only the schoolboy's excitement over "the one sin worth sinning"; Patmore perceived sin itself in a celestial aspect after the poor sensual pleasure had been left like a dead glow-worm. By sin, he wrote, "Heaven obtained the exquisite edge of sorrow." He lifted his Muse as high as Christ raised the Magdalen, since

## COVENTRY PATMORE

“Love is not love which does not sweeter live  
For having something dreadful to forgive.”

It is with Crashaw and Constable that Patmore found his nearest kindred in English poetry, though Blake was his only fellow-Swedenborgian. He would not have shrunk from Constable's famous sonnet to the Magdalen, “for like a woman-spouse my soul shall be.” Owing to its daring conclusion that lovely Sonnet was always omitted from the collected verse, but it was Patmorean to the core :—

“When death shall bring the night of my delight,  
My soul unclothed shall rest from labours past  
And clasped in the arms of God enjoy  
By sweet conjunction everlasting joy.”

For him the erotic was transfigured when mysticized. From coarseness his austerity shrank and it was typical that he should call Hardy's novel “Jude the Impure”.

Apart from this unbridable mystic, there was the quaintest and most contradictory of characters in Patmore. Dr. Garnett attempted to catch some of his contrasts : “a rugged angularity steeped in Rembrandtlike contrasts of light and gloom. Haughty, imperious, combative, sardonic, sensitive, susceptible ; magnanimous and rancorous, egotistic and capriciously generous ; acute and credulous, nobly veracious and prone to the wildest exaggerations.” He was a severe martinet at home. Fate had rewarded him for his great Poem. His numerous and

## SUBLIME FAILURES

successful marriages made him a domestic optimist. His pessimism was reserved for politics which became darker in his later days. So lurid seemed the prospect of Revolution on the South Coast in the 'eighties that he invested much of his fortune in jewelry. He did not trust the Banks. At the same time he had a poetical passion for rubies natural to one, who had felt in childhood "the jewel-like brilliancy of ripe red currants in the evening sunlight". His soul wore sable raiment during the dispensations of Mr. Gladstone. There were days when he could find no one but Lord Stratford de Redcliffe to share his gloom. He prophesied that Gladstone would become a Danton. Gladstone's eloquence only seemed like lava that involved darkness with light. In his Ode "1880-1885" he wrote one terrible couplet:—

"Yon strives their leader lustng to be seen  
His leprosy's so perfect that men call him clean."

Patmore's welcome to the Liberal advance was not more polite:—

"Forward! glad rush of Gergesenian swine;  
You've gained the hilltop, but there's yet the brine."

Compare this with Tennyson's maudlin sonnet to Gladstone on the Redistribution Bill of 1886: "Steersman be not precipitate in thine act."

After Tennyson's death, Patmore's claims to the dried Laurel of the State were presented to Mr. Gladstone, who assured the applicant that Patmore "had died many years before". Mr. Gladstone, who had

## COVENTRY PATMORE

a facility for remembering poetry, good and bad, had perhaps not forgotten the sting in Patmore's lines. Patmore never dreamed of writing for the bays with which an unpoetical nation rewards the Muse. He sought unpopularity even amongst fellow-Catholics. He disdained the Irish brogue which accents the Catholic majority in England :—

“ for leagued alas are we  
With many a faithful rogue  
Discrediting bright Truth with dirt and brogue.”

Such flawless Toryism went the length of dismissing Catholic Emancipation as a mistake. He was against disestablishing the Church of England. He may have had subtle motives behind such views. He presented a bell to a Protestant Church not from sympathy but because he disliked their belfrey's tone. Of his own Clergy he never ceased to speak despairingly. “ I never meet a priest,” he said, “ but I ask myself: can the Church last another year ? ” But this was qualified invariably by his next converse with an unbeliever, which sent him on his knees to thank God he was a Catholic !

His sudden indignations deserved a nobler term than annoyance. Such was his dislike for the Press, which seemed like literature given the Gergesenian franchise, that he kept a pet raven, to whom certain sheets were handed for regular destruction. He could not help being an extremist, and never more so than when criticizing so-called extremists. It accounted

## SUBLIME FAILURES

for his liberal supply of poetical exaggerations in daily life. If he heard a blackbird, he noted a covey of nightingales. He was certain that Bodiam Castle was a finer pile than Windsor. Such was his delight in the Downs that he declared mountains were “great imposters, petrified catastrophes, stationary tumult, nothing heaped upon nothing, barren bigness that boasts itself more beautiful than life”. Even the fine old game of whist was played under the unalterable conviction that he was always winning. The rumour of woman’s approach to politics led him to declare that “if there is anything God hates utterly it is a clever woman”. Nor did he spare the corresponding type amongst men. He laid down that prigs were in a state of mortal sin. He never veiled humdrum truths in daily life. Of children he remarked that “their so-called innocence is want of practise”. He had an answer to everything. Sometimes it was rude, and sometimes it was mystical. He alarmed his fellow-squires and failed of his rural ambition to become a Justice of the Peace. He was self-sufficient and could bear to be set aside by Christians or critics. After meeting a greater lion he observed : “I ought to feel as proud as a cod’s head and shoulders brought to the same table as a pheasant.” Silences fell from him as wonderfully in conversation as in his Odes. He disdained to use the polyfluous and plebian act of voting. Prophets do not poll their opinions. He uttered his to the stars. Better be unheard upon the heights than win snuffling

## COVENTRY PATMORE

acquiescence from the mob below. He saw order in the stellar confusions, for “the bright disorder of the stars is solved by music”.

In his own trade he became a keen and rather startling critic. His aphorisms about books would make pretty gleaning, for he seldom said the obvious. He delighted in Gibbon, whom he reconciled with his Faith by observing that “his sneers are almost always at priests not at religion”. The *Imitation of Christ* he thought a hothouse book written for monks. He found Swedenborg full of Catholic intuitions. He learnt from him that Individuality leads to Heaven. Hell might be an impersonal storage of negative souls. St. Thomas Aquinas gave him a life-reading. He owned the splendid vellum copy which had passed from Pius the Fifth to Philip of Spain. This copy he presented to the British Museum in reparation for hours wasted in official service. *O felix culpa!*

Of the poets, he once wrote to Mrs. Meynell (5th December, 1885) “Shakespeare above all who ever lived knew the art of tempering extremities with extreme sweet, which is the secret of great pathos. Aristotle, who is worth fifty Platos, says that after exceeding ill a little good is the essence of pathos. I put that phrase, as you will remember, into the Ode called “Eurydice”. There is plenty of that in Shakespeare, but very little of it in any other poet.”

Shelley he described as “all unsubstantial splendour like the transformation scene of a pantomime or the silvered globes hung up in gin palaces”. He

## SUBLIME FAILURES

compared reading Milton to “trying to breathe in a vacuum”. He credited Browning with nearly every poetical faculty in an eminent degree except that of writing poetry. He thought the greatest poem in English was Wordsworth’s *Excursion*. And on a joyous day he said that “a minute of love is better than a play of Shakespeare”. He found “real feebleness and assumed impetuosity” in Kingsley. Newman he would not consider a poet at all. Novels he read on the ground that “a good love-story corroborates what I have learned from mystics”. He was one of the few to appreciate Barnes, the Dorset poet, finding that he mingled Wordsworth with Burns. The poems of Barnes may be described as natural flowers smelling of the earth, while Hardy’s read like a set of ironical tombstones.

Although the rumour and aureole of his great Poem accompanied his retirement, Patmore sank in popular estimation between his successful rivals. Tennyson flattered the prig, and Swinburne the pig in British readers, that is when taken at their very worst. Patmore meant little to such audiences. Is Old Sarum even haunted by his Angel? His *Unknown Eros* remains unknown. He never came into his own for his own knew him not. His glittering disciple, Francis Thompson, reaped much of the fame which was due to Patmore, who except for a rare coinage seldom dipped into the bubbling mint of the younger poet. Sweet and simple was his language as his themes: but he spoke of Winter’s “Trophonian

## COVENTRY PATMORE

pallor", of "praeter-nuptial ecstacy", of Night's "blazing photosphere" and of the "prepense-occulted word". He sang too of "lazuline delight" though in manuscripts he tried first "azure-eyed" and then "lazure-laughed".

On Francis Thompson he bestowed his keen but loving criticism, hailing him as a "greater Crashaw". "The roar and foam of the phraseology conceal from me, for the most part, the current of the meaning," and again "Aristotle says that it should have a continual slight novelty: whereas Francis Thompson seems to me to aim at a continual violent novelty. It will require much self-discipline in the poet to correct this exorbitancy which, though it may please the vulgar as the same fault does in Browning, it will not win permanent admiration."

Patmore found his own critic in the pen of Mrs. Meynell. From her came the appreciation for which his soul had yearned. To her he presented all his manuscripts and he made her participant of the supreme correspondence of his lifetime. She became the delighted Alice of his mystical wonderland. In one shining phrase she placed him "twixt Anacreon and Plato". Taking his whimsical sense of humour, he could have been equally placed between Puck and Pindar. Of the quality of *The Angel in the House*, Mrs. Meynell once wrote: "Children are taught that if the frame of a man were unpacked of its organs, no hand of man would be able to replace them all within the space they had filled: and in a like manner, a

## SUBLIME FAILURES

quatrain of Coventry Patmore's writings, if any one by fault of memory should chance to spill its words and phrases, would baffle a restorer. There is assuredly nothing tight or thronged or hard, but the fullness is definite."

What was the secret of that style save that he was unwilling to leave anything but his best to Posterity? "My steady ambition has all along been to make my words things and not words about things." The whole art of precision was contained in his use of the dash. As he said, "the poet who uses it often is burning his gunpowder in a saucer instead of a barrel." What Mrs. Meynell wrote of him was all he wished to remain to his memory.

He wrote some charming lyrics for her and to her alone. But as he wrote (2nd September, 1895), "Really song cannot touch her. Art is a superficies, Life a solid. She is the solid out of which are made all shows of good and fair, and nothing but tongueless love can praise her." It was a final paradox that Patmore with his delicious contempt for woman's brain should find himself halted in love and amazement before a smiling but feminine mind. Hitherto, although he admitted that a woman's charm could be enhanced by cigarettes, Greek, and Athletics, he looked upon tricycles and Radicalism as outrages against nature. When asked to address a company of devout women, he wrote: "One thing came into my head almost irresistibly. If I had given them any such saying: You look like goddesses and you chatter

## COVENTRY PATMORE

like monkeys, I believe they would have forgiven the satire for the compliment."

Under Mrs. Meynell's silences satire was inclined to die, and compliments were all in vain. The friendship became absorbing, perhaps devastating. He corresponded anxiously with Mr. Meynell about her health. He tried to reduce her fasting and attendance in Church. "Piety minus good sense equals superstition," was one of his postscripts. Her selection from his poems under the heading of Pathos and Delight raised his sales. But the shadow of inequality descended upon the friendship. Worse, George Meredith appeared to take his place. He wrote to Mr. Meynell that he had been "paralysed by finding from her own words and acts that my primacy in her friendship has been superseded". Still he craved her criticism, and asked to be informed of her illnesses by telegram. In the last year of his life he wrote :—

(2nd January, 1896.) "One cannot live long without delight. But I have done the best I could with such faculty as I had. I have always given my heart to that which is highest: and I can wait to die as Clough said."

(18th October, 1896.) "For the past four and a half years I have devoted myself exclusively to her service and would gladly have done so during the rest of my life."

And later to herself :—

"My dear lady, I am dying. Remember my last request. Let not your thoughts deny nor your heart forget the things

## SUBLIME FAILURES

your eyes have seen. Do not destroy the immortality of your truest visions by calling them moods. You are not disloyal to any lesser good in transcending the higher. Our meeting again in Heaven depends on your fidelity to the highest things you have known."

Where the reader begins to look for the outpourings of his spirit towards her, there are no survivals save scraps, little scissored hints of that overwhelming adoration. "I go on with a perpetual heartache. None can see God or goddess and live." That she was unable to respond to his chivalry save by a critic's just and perfect praise is seared upon the friendship. But, as he wrote, he could not live without delight, and when the sight of the goddess was withheld, he could only wilt and wither. He perished of the magnificent loneliness of his love. "I am literally dying of having seen God and of the vision having been withdrawn."

Hence the value of all that she wrote about him in the appraisement or introduction of his poems, and especially the pathetic note she wrote for the Sale Catalogue of his books a quarter of a century after he was dead. It was apparently all that the greatest poet of modern love reaped from the greatest and most hopeless of modern literary loves. It was as though he beheld his Angel at last and died.

## COVENTRY PATMORE

### *Note by Alice Meynell to the Catalogue of Coventry Patmore's books*

“ Coventry Patmore was hardly, in the usual sense, a man of letters, still less a literary man, because loving poetry passionately as he did, he passed through and beyond letters, beyond the letter of any poem that he approved. You did not hear him quote this or that beautiful phrase for its beauty : he cited it because it was true, because it bore witness or seemed to him to bear witness, to a truth he had at heart, the truth of his own mysticism. But he found that truth in fine poetry only. He loved literature not less, but more because it was, as it were, a thing to him and not merely an art. But in order to be this great thing to him, it was always art of the first order. As to his own poetry, believing himself to hold a mystical message, to be delivered, he used his poet's power to clothe it in words poetically great. Yet the words 'to clothe' are precisely wrong ; they should rather be 'to incarnate'. For him the meaning was divine and the word was living flesh and blood. It is true, if somewhat paradoxically true, that in order to make the perfect poem that he would call simply the true poem, the lesser faculty of fine taste was indispensable. He was thus what he would not have professed to be, a masterly critic. Patmore's words were born alive. Obviously to say so much is not to assert that he produced his work whole, suddenly, a feat that would be rather miraculous than simply wonderful. Patmore

## SUBLIME FAILURES

corrected diligently, because, like other great poets, he had to wait for the true word. When the true word came, there was no more question, it was the living word. And, besides things of this importance, there were all the auxiliaries of verse, and these he polished with an assiduity that minor poets would think unnecessary.

“ When he was accused, as he was by the trivial, of writing trivialities in *The Angel in the House*, Coventry Patmore made no reply. He had a great imagination, but he had not the smaller faculty of fancy that enables a man to put himself into the place of another. And it was impossible to him to put himself into the place of the many others, the crowd. He did not know what so many readers meant, when they mocked his commonplaces, details of a wedding and prattle of a bride. He was glad to find the lofty poetry of ‘The Unknown Eros’ to be profoundly admired by a reader whom its beauty, even after an old acquaintance of the *Angel*, had taken by surprise. Yet to that reader’s fervent praises of the later work his rejoinder was : ‘ But it is all in the *Angel* and in “ The Victories of Love ” and in the “ Wedding Sermon ”,’ caring little for the difference of story and setting and never guessing how important that difference was to his reader. Yet to say that he was not, in the ordinary sense, a literary poet, is not to deny that he took a keen interest in versification. Metre delighted him. He justly held that his mastery of the octosyllabic verse with its rhymes was worth

## COVENTRY PATMORE

the long study he had given it. The words, as has been said, were born alive ; their order was to him a matter of keen pleasure. The lines and pauses of the *Odes* measured chiefly by the variable breathing of thought and passion, he held to be the work of an art all his own, even his own discovery. Let it be noted that when he talked of his poems it was of their metres. When a reader, much moved by the proofs of deep tribulation in the *Unknown Eros*, ventured : ' You have suffered,' his reply was a briefly prosaic ' Yes ', he said, ' in my affections '.

" It should be known that the name Angel is not intended to be the title of a woman. *The Angel in the House* was Love. If Coventry Patmore himself ever spoke of the heroine of the little story as the Angel, it was probably only by a kind of habit caught from the habit of the public when the poem was very popular, and people spoke of the *Angel* as the wife, to whose memory the book was dedicated. He had too much regard to the art of painting to consent to make an Angel feminine. It was only in the last decline of the schools that Angels appeared with a feminine, a female, form, as they have kept in the yet later weakness of quite modern design. Patmore had rather in his mind the athletic angels of the Old Testament, such as he, who caught up a prophet and carried him across country by the hair of his head. Moreover, Coventry Patmore was a Roman Catholic, and he knew Angels to have names that men and only men aspire to bear, Michael, Gabriel, Raphael.

## SUBLIME FAILURES

“At a time when the *vers libre* has obtained a popular success of novelty, it would be well for those who have not understood how infallibly true poetry accepts the shape of metre, to note Coventry Patmore’s love of law. He entrusted the range and flight of his thought and the urgency of his passion at first to his eight syllable explicit shape and rhyme, the law of common consent, and later to the less obvious but equally sure implicit shapes and rhymes of the immortal *Odes*, the poet’s law unto himself.”

The end was 26th November, 1896. On receipt of the news, Mrs. Meynell passed into a darkened room where she remained for a time. To the great grief of Patmoreans she burnt all the poet’s letters save fragments. Perhaps England was not worthy of a revelation between a modern Dante and his Beatrice. But this is the only possible consolation.

Patmore had left a laughing Epitaph buried in his writings, and it is too typical of his sweet and mocking spirit to be left there. He wrote: “When I die there will be no discerning Dean to bury me upon his own responsibility in Westminster Abbey; and on my obscure tombstone some democrat may scribble, Here lies the last of the Flunkeys !”

His son, Francis, thought “his last years were far from happy, and his soul longed for death and to see his God face to face”. He used to walk out into the lanes of a hot July night and cry aloud, “My God, how cold, how cold !” And these mysterious words

## COVENTRY PATMORE

he explained as of “a spiritual cold”. There is something deeply revealing and pathetic in this cry of his soul.

Patmore was himself to the end, devout and sardonic. A few days before his death he indited a heretical letter to the Omar Khayyam Club, calling on men to cling to religion and destroy priestcraft. Death he met with a clear vision. When the assisting priest was overcome by emotion, the dying man continued the prayers and delivered his own soul into the night. It was once told of a German Meistersinger that he had sung so divinely of women, that rather than suffer his body to be bruised, they buried him with their own hands. Mrs. Meynell laid the laurel wreath on Coventry Patmore dead. Laurels were the meed of one so humble that he once said : “ What am I that flowers should touch me ? ” Nothing more exquisite was said since men were bidden to consider the lilies.

He was buried in the habit of the Third Order of Saint Francis : the shroud of Dante. His monument was unusual : a miniature Obelisk with four small engraven lions. The meaning of the symbolism was that he considered the Obelisk “ one of the boldest and most impressive symbols ever devised to teach men that the Lion of the Tribe of Judah came out of Egypt : that the great serpent Pharaoh or Nature is become Christ by His assumption of the body which without him is Egypt ”. This must always remain a little beyond the gravediggers at Lymington. The

## SUBLIME FAILURES

monument also bore Catholic symbolism and such inscriptions as “the bliss of Heaven is the synthesis of absolute content and infinite desire”.

One may regret that no one added his more famous description of Heaven as “the eternal agony of God’s first kiss”, a phrase sufficient to describe Bernini’s marble Ecstasy of Saint Teresa in Rome. Two other aphorisms might have been added from unprinted fragments :

“The clear heat of Purgatory preferable even now to obscure delights.”

“Our utmost felicities here are only the notes of the Music of Heaven touched by a Child.”

There is difficulty in catching the essence of so quaint and finical a being as Coventry Patmore. He escapes sprite-like from the ponderous *Biography* in which Champneys tried to bottle him. Gosse’s conscientious study lacked sympathy with his supernaturalism. He mistook Patmore’s *Arbor Vitae*, a wonderful vision of the Church of Rome, for a political screed. Like the bumble-bee, which has no honey of its own, he buzzed round the petals of Swinburne and Patmore. Osbert Burdett has written as an inspired disciple of *The Idea of Coventry Patmore*. The interpretations by Mrs. Meynell are those which the poet would acclaim in death.

And the student will ask why should failure be predicated of so bright a spirit? His Epic won him an audience whom he lost. He and the public disappointed each other. Even his friends were

## COVENTRY PATMORE

unmoved by his first *Odes*, which he burnt in their trial edition. In the end they found only the elect, and the elect will find them from generation to generation. The Greeks, who worshipped Homer as their Laureate, could appreciate Pindar no less. The mass-readers of Tennyson left Patmore undisturbed. Possibly his inconsistencies lost him support. He chanted Anglican Cathedral life and was next heard of in Rome. He sang the Angel in the House, but he married three. He would have married thirty had he needed to renew the symbol. His little son on first hearing that his mamma was not the first said, to Patmore's huge humour: "You must be half as bad as Henry the Eighth!" A bard one day, a Squire the next, he did not seem steady in his sorrows or his hobbies. As he wrote once to Francis Thompson (3rd November, 1895): "Thank God I never get used to any true good. I would rather hang for ever on the Cross of a lost felicity than that it should be consumed by the rust of use." He was pitiful in the common things of life, and so finical in the pretty things that he said Manners would probably be the only Art cultivated in the next world. He was faithful to the superb idea which dominated his pen, and thither no public could follow him.

The reader must be content with the elusive image preserved in the Sargent portrait. Sublime caricature it was, in which the nightingale was made to look sparrowish and the eagle of song was served like a white-breasted stork. For Sargent was a painter of the

## SUBLIME FAILURES

earth earthy and an acrobat in oils. Even his brush could not give that touch to Patmore's appearance which was given by a writer in the *Academy*: "The skin of his face somewhat flaccid and innumerably wrinkled, the eyelids had a pendulous droop, under which gleamed a scimitar-like line of steel-blue eye. But under emotion the lid would suddenly widen and the eye darken in a remarkable manner."

Realizing that something still eluded him, Sargent repainted Patmore secretly on the walls of the Boston Library as the Prophet Ezekiel. It was Ezekiel who had given Patmore one of the greatest of his metaphors, that of "the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain". This was the promise of God and poet against "the deluge of the disordered senses". Between the two portraits no doubt lies the real likeness of the lonely and elusive Victorian, who believed that, when he was not playing Squire or journalist, he had reached the burning riddle of the Universe. For him that riddle was no Gordian Knot to be cut, no Sphinx to be despoiled of her secret, but a starry zone to be loosed from the Body of a Woman, whose feet rested upon a Moon of Silver, and whose womb had become golden through a God's delight.

LORD CURZON

1859-1925





## LORD CURZON

SINCE the reign of the first King Henry, Curzons have held Kedleston. Their motto bids Curzon hold what Curzon held. There have been many branches and some Peerages. Younger scions lent nobility to the Upper House as Howe and Zouche. Their arms were distinguished even in mediaeval zoology : three golden popinjays adorned with collars of scarlet. The sound Churchmanship of the family was once crowned by the scarlet hat which Cardinal Curzon of Kedleston hoisted over his popinjays. The Peerage of Scarsdale adorned the Kedleston line. The Curzons survived revolutions and changes in State and Church. With the aid of heiresses Curzons held what Curzons held, but nothing particularly happened for centuries until the Reverend Alfred Nathaniel Baron Scarsdale, a Peer in Holy Orders, begat in holy matrimony, George Nathaniel. Like one of those exotic plants, which flower once a century, the Curzon stock germinated distinction at even longer lapses.

George grew in grace to be a wise and sensitive youth. The Spartan upbringing of youth was one of the last privileges of the British aristocracy. A savage governess followed by a savage tutor attempted to make and mar him. George had a Jewish grandmother, and perhaps could bear persecution

## SUBLIME FAILURES

unconsciously. This strain must have been also responsible for his financial genius and taste for the unrefined side of splendour.

Doctor Johnson had visited Kedleston during his talkative travels, and when the foolish Boswell murmured that he should think the proprietor of all this must be happy, the Doctor rapped: "Nay Sir, all this excludes but one evil, poverty." To the exclusion of this last enemy of noble houses, George Curzon was to devise schemes and ways. That he died in affluence is one of the consolations of his *Biography*, written by Lord Ronaldshay in three lordly volumes, from whose sympathetic survey any estimate of his failure or success must be based.

Life first cast its lures for George Curzon at Eton, where he found himself deposited in a rough house presided over by the Reverend Wolley Dod. In the careless and athletic atmosphere the delicate and attractive boy skated over moral danger. Wolley Dod was worthy but unsuitable to deal with boys out of the ordinary run. The part of Guardian Angel was played by another housemaster, Oscar Browning: radiant, robust, and rotund, with un-Etonian views for educating Etonians.

To turn back a few years, Eton had passed through a phase of conflict amongst the masters, William Cory and Oscar Browning had sought to introduce a leaven of culture amongst their pupils, which had been mistaken for æstheticism. Dr. Hornby, the traditional type of head master, watched with grim dislike for

## LORD CURZON

an opening of attack. Cory, the most inspired of Eton masters, had been the first to fall. Like all great teachers, Cory and Browning knew the value of favouritism. Cory had picked out such pupils as Mr. Balfour and Lord Rosebery. He had made the son of an English Bishop the subject of some exquisite and platonic letters. This youth knew the peril as well as the beauty of such communications, for before his early death he enclosed them in an envelope marked for destruction. His father, the Bishop, broke the seal and forwarded the letters to Hornby, who was immensely shocked, and cast Cory from Eton. So effectively was the truth hushed that at the dinner at the end of the year, Browning innocently uttered a eulogy to Cory's memory. Before he resumed his seat, he noticed that Hornby's head was resting on his plate. From that moment Hornby was determined to dismiss him as well. The immediate and innocent occasion was George Curzon.

Of this the *Biography* tells nothing, and the *Life of Oscar Browning* by Mr. Wortham, must be consulted. Browning had made his rooms a refuge for boys who were interested in other Muses than those who have been mummified in the classical curriculum. Browning helped clever boys like Curzon in their work, but he encouraged confidences on subjects more intimate than the cæsura of Latin verse. The indignant Wolley Dod complained to the indignant Hornby. Apart from gossip about Browning's "irrepressible attentions" to Curzon, the Eton code

## SUBLIME FAILURES

had been interfered with. Browning also helped Curzon out of school hours to win a French prize, to the further indignation of his tutor. Wolley Dod laid formal complaint that Browning not only did Curzon's work for him, but took him for drives. Browning's excuse that he was preserving Curzon from the dangers of Mr. Wolley Dod's establishment did not smooth matters. Hornby sent for Browning, and remarked with brutal lucidity : "I hear Mr. Wolley Dod has a good-looking pupil." Hornby was remorseless, and demanded that the friendship should cease. But it had passed beyond the stage when that was possible. Wolley Dod found, as was to be expected, that Curzon had become " querulous and spoilt " : while Curzon, the more he saw of Wolley Dod, the more he detested him. And the more that Hornby saw of Browning the more he detested Browning, so that a clash was inevitable. It brought lifetime results upon the two friends.

Although Hornby had extracted some promise of non-interference from Browning, the friendship continued, and Lord Scarsdale, for good reasons, wished it to continue. Under Browning's inspiration, Curzon studied Dante and won an Italian prize this time, " to the surprise and annoyance of the Italian master," with whom he was on bad terms. The friendship was transferred to the holidays, and the devoted pedagogue took Curzon on a series of foreign tours, which no head-master could impede. Curzon meantime had shed the tutorship of Wolley Dod, who

## LORD CURZON

looked to Hornby for vengeance. Browning went thickheadedly on his way. He could not believe that his influence could be bad. Hornby would not believe it to be good, and bided his opportunity. On the trumped-up charge that the permissible number of boys had been exceeded in his house, Browning was dismissed. There arose a storm in Eton circles, but there is no appeal from the Speaker or the Pope or from the Head Master of Eton. Questions were threatened by Browning's friends in the Commons, but the unruffled Hornby gathered his gown victoriously under his arm, and went his way. Browning was sent to King's College, Cambridge, which could be used as a home as well as a nursery for Eton masters. There he continued to inspire and instruct youth until his universal fame forced his further retirement to Rome, where he died in great old age, consoled by the Order of the British Empire. The hostilities he roused at Cambridge were as great as those he had roused at Eton, and it was only on the understanding that he had no relationship to the Phoenix that his cremated ashes were allowed to rest in the Chapel at King's. This was the man who played the same part to George Curzon as Aristotle to Alexander the Great.

Whatever reasons Hornby gave the world for Browning's dismissal, Eton knew that the reason lay with George Curzon. The friendship proved a turning point in the boy's life. His eyes became contemptuous towards the leisures and popularities

of Eton of the time. With an industrious few he advanced into the expanses of History, and trod that most mockingly named of schoolbooks, the *Gradus ad Parnassum*. He was even drawn to the mysterious horizon of literature. But he never forgot the enthusiastic friend of his youth. He introduced him to his wife as the man to whom he owed all that he was and, as though to extinguish the gossip of his schooldays, he invited him as an honoured guest to his Indian Durbar. Before Curzon left Eton, Cory had prophesied that a pupil of his own would surpass him for chief place in the State, Arthur Balfour.

From Eton Curzon duly progressed to Oxford, but Eton always remained his surmise of the Paradisal. He kept a replica of his Eton room at Kedleston, like a cage imprisoning the phantom of happier days. Lord Esher pointed out that Curzon always remained an Eton boy: “brilliant, generous, broad-minded, lavish of his endowments, faithful in friendship: mature at 18, clear in his outlook, consistent in aim, and brave in misfortune.” Eton had accentuated his poor health, but no curvature of the spine was allowed to bend his ambitions. The frail bone was stiffened by an iron corset which bred a certain irritation in his character. He became unkind or cruelly patronizing to all of a lower class or calibre than his own. Unsparring of himself, he was always unsparring of servants. Towards the great he early became a master of acceptable approach. He knew well that men rise upon the stepping stones of flattery to place

## LORD CURZON

and power. At Eton he had taken advantage of his position as Captain of the Oppidans to call on Mr. Gladstone. At Oxford he learnt the supreme importance of moving in the best circles. He came under the influence of the famous Dr. Jowett, who combined the innocence of the sage with the cunning of the snob. Many wisps showed the rising wind. Curzon had early been voted "superior" in the manner that the epithet "judicious" stuck to Hooker and "soapy" to Bishop Sam Wilberforce. He was stated, half in envy and half in jest, to "dine at Blenheim once a week". His contemporaries laid carpets of pleasant admonishment before him. Lord Esher, who was fond of keeping a finger in promising pies, encouraged him to aspire because "you will get round everybody as you have got round me". Oxford had the effect of flattering him into fatal prolixity of speech. In years to come, Parliamentary debates, European Congresses, or private secretaries were to be enmeshed in the ponderous gossamer which he developed. The Oxford manner, the Oxford accent, the Oxford irony, have remained like emanations out of the eighteenth century. They absorbed George Curzon in speech and soul.

Fate was already anxious to acidulate the golden apple he had plucked off the Tree of Life. He wasted too much time in debates. His attention to the Forum lost him the triumph of the Academy. In other words, he failed to attain his First. Second Class men are invariably consoled by the number of men who take

## SUBLIME FAILURES

First Class in examination, but fail in life. But Curzon was inconsolable. Jowett very kindly described Curzon's set-back as an accident, but his writhing pupil recognized only "the brand of respectable mediocrity". According to the legend he decided henceforth to live in order to prove his examiners wrong. He threw himself at several prizes which he carried off by sheer power of assault. He missed the Lothian at the first charge owing to a certain pretentiousness of style, but he took it at the second. He became a Fellow of All Souls and once happened to notice the future novelist Anthony Hope *né* Hawkins, studying for the Arnold. He determined he was his match, and after a fortnight's severe study in the British Museum, delivered his Essay, and passed into the Orient. Some months later a stray copy of *The Times* told him of victory.

The next decade was devoted to travel. He swept Asia with energy and endurance equalling any claim of St. Paul to become a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. Committing his commentaries and fortunes to an old brown bag, he circumvented the world twice. It was typical of his pliant mind that during the first voyage he concluded that China would defeat Japan, and that after the second he was no less certain that Japan would conquer China. His real ambition was to reach the Amir of Afghanistan, who was one of those nuts, which neither the Foreign nor the India Office were able to crack. Curzon set out with the same zest

## LORD CURZON

as a mediaeval pilgrim seeking an interview with Prester John. He wrote for permission to visit Kabul in the style of the Arabian Nights. He likened the Amir's presence to "the sparkle in the heart of the diamond". He entreated "the full ray of truth upon imperfect knowledge". Unfortunately, he was restrained from home, and he burst into muttered wrath. Lord Kimberley's conduct could only be described as "mulish" while the reigning Viceroy was arraigned for sending "an idiotic telegram".

But Curzon held the path that Curzon held, and he was able to reach Kabul, and even refresh his soul in the diamantine sparkle he had hailed with such rapture from afar. The Amir proved affable, and in the course of conversation let slip the all-important name of his successor. In return for this news, the Old Man of the Mountains was left with the belief that the House of Commons, in which his guest exerted so large an influence, was an assembly of 600 wise men, and that Curzon himself aspired to the hand of the widowed Queen Victoria ! This gallant but very improbable supposition proved useful on his Eastern travels. The necessity of placating a future Prince Consort was obvious to Oriental statesmen. Although he learnt no further secrets in Kabul, he discovered the sources of the Oxus River, which procured him the gratitude and even the gold medal of the Royal Geographical. Amongst his visits of ceremony was one to the Viceroy at Calcutta. It was an omen to find the official residence had been

## SUBLIME FAILURES

modelled on Kedleston. There can be little doubt what thoughts assailed him on the stairs. The Fates recognize the strongest and most deserving form of prayer. Certainly they heard his unspoken but immoderate desire.

From the moment he entered the House of Commons, he awaited the splendid awards which a bantling of Oscar Browning had been taught to expect. Lord Salisbury made him an Under-Secretary. It was perilous for members to ask him questions, for he knew Asian countries at first hand. He began to chafe in a very high-mettled manner. He could not approve Lord Salisbury's deference to France, combined with conciliation of Germany. Surely England could afford a little isolated insular defiance? The bone of Heligoland was thrown to Berlin. Siam was tossed alive to France, causing the new Under-Secretary to stifle a growl: "France has already behaved criminally, England weakly, Siam foolishly: and when folly, weakness, and crime are in competition, it is the last-named as a rule that wins." Nevertheless, Curzon's own policy for China seemed a furtherance of the competition he deplored. It was simply "to pounce the moment anyone else pounces". Never was Western or Christian policy in the East stated in simpler terms.

Travel had made Curzon a rising Imperialist. He felt the same veneration for the Empire as the Roman Pro-consuls, who passed through the Provinces of old. The Empire was dawning upon him as a religion,

## LORD CURZON

in which he was destined to play the part of a high priest. Christianity had not been revealed to him at Eton or Oxford as either a superior or a veracious religion. His views were the views of Gibbon, but his emotions craved the system, which binds souls into a Crusade, and he found the system centred at Downing Street. His egotism developed a youthful worship of the Empire over which floated his own star.

To one, who had ranged Asia, the corridors and lobbies of the House of Commons proved a severe confinement. His duties were gruelling, and they were not always as dignified as he could have wished. He, who had crossed the Pamirs of Afghanistan, was made to fence against gentlemen-Radicals like Dilke and Labouchere, or exchange the heavier stroke of shillelagh with the Irish. His chief weapon of defence was a highly exasperating manner. As a young man his nerves had become rasped, and it is noted that the high-strung Kaiser preferred not to see him in Berlin. The two young men racked by their ambitions could only have given each other screams. Even so, Curzon's chosen subject for conversation in Berlin was the Kaiser's boyish telegram to Kruger. Curzon might be said to have taken a tenth fiddle in the orchestra of nations called the European Concert. It differed from the present League of Nations by being audible, respected, and, when well-conducted, perfectly efficient.

Curzon already showed signs that he was not always

## SUBLIME FAILURES

careful whom he offended. Salisbury thought it necessary for him to revise an unflattering picture of the Shah. He was next to learn that it was more dangerous to incur the wrath of a great newspaper than that of a Minor Potentate. He dared accuse a *Times* correspondent in Pekin of making "an intelligent anticipation of events before they occur". Although no words could better describe the special talent of "the special correspondent", this was taken in serious displeasure by *The Times*. It was the beginning of a long hostility from the Press. Curzon's views extended vastly beyond his electorate. Like all Imperialists he lived in two worlds, home and abroad. His own field of destiny he had mapped Orientally. The prospect of political defeat delighted him with an excuse for "one last gorgeous frolic in the remote and untamed East". This did not prevent him regarding his Commons career as a great success. So favourably was he impressed that he recommended himself in April, 1897, to Salisbury for the Indian Viceroyalty. In the year following, Salisbury took him at his own valuation, and recommended his name to the Queen. Salisbury's most cynical strokes were often his most successful. The experiment was one in any case, which neither he nor the Queen were likely to see concluded. The very old are often justified when they leave things in the hands of the young. Both Salisbury and his Sovereign happened to be weary of Grand Old Men at the time. So Curzon was admitted to his zenith before he was 40. A hush

## LORD CURZON

befell political Clubs and lobbies. George Curzon had taken steamer for the throne of the Moguls.

It was necessary to raise him to the Upper House, as his proud father still lived. Curzon had a wise instinct for remaining in the Commons, so his new Peerage was absurdly placed in the Kingdom of Ireland. This geographical inexactitude did not deceive his Destiny. The career, to which it led, cut off his final return to the Commons, where alone could the prize he most desired be attained.

When he left for India, he decided to add a Vicereine to his suite. The wife he chose could only be an adornment to himself and India. In the course of an American trip he had already surveyed Miss Leiter. Even if he had chosen in haste, he had been careful to wait and marry at leisure. His was far from being a bachelor soul, for fair women had been permitted to decorate his inner life. He had kept his associations hitherto so high that it was a surprise when he married beneath a Curzon. There is no need to dwell on the home town of his father-in-law, which was Chicago : nor on the occupation of Mr. Leiter junior, which (lest a meaner be imagined) can be described as a manipulator of wheat.

Apart from her great wealth, Miss Leiter was worthy to be the star of India. Her husband idealized her and, since she lived and died under the conviction that he was the most brilliant of the living, their marriage proved a continual romance lived upon the pinnacles of the world. Curzon never pretended that

he had married the daughter of a nobleman for a moment, but she was a goddess to the eye, and she bore Christian names, worthy of a British Princess, Mary Victoria.

Curzon's policy was neither to spare himself nor others. While he kept his head in the heights, he was insistent in criticizing the carpet at his feet. Such microscopic activity was new to the throne of the Moguls. He felt that he was now face to face with History, that terrible one, whom Oscar Browning worshipped dimly below with inkpots and papers rustling like a prayer wheel. Curzon decided that History is made by attention to detail. Nothing was allowed to escape his eye, even if it sometimes escaped his sense of judgment. He discovered three errors in the inscription placed over Macaulay's house in Calcutta. He laid down to all ages what was not known before, that Departmentalism is "an intellectual hiatus". He looked around and found himself hindered by a Bureaucracy, European in germ but Oriental in growth. He insisted that it should be simplified. He found that the White Man's burden consisted chiefly of pyramids of papers impeding the dispatch of business. No forward step could be taken under six months. The new Viceroy met the old ways with accumulated sarcasms: "When I suggest six weeks, pained surprise; if six days, pathetic protests; if six hours, stupefied resignation." However, where there is a Viceregal will, there is generally an official way. He was always the best

## LORD CURZON

informed though, as he told Sir Harcourt Butler, “with abysmal ignorance it is impossible to cope.” He cannot have been surprised to be met with “mingled bewilderment and pain” by the officials, while at the same time his wife was invoked by the natives as a beneficent divinity against famine or the plague.

Now it came to pass that the days of Curzon were often days of Famine. One of his few ill-chosen metaphors spoke of “clouds in a lowering sky”, since it was the lack of rainfall which equated death. He figured himself under a better simile as the prophet, who watched from Carmel for the little cloud as big as a man’s hand. The huge relief-works reminded him of the children of Israel toiling at the pyramids. British statesmen of the great grain are fond of allusions from the Bible. Continental speakers are as reserved in quoting Scripture as Englishmen of incurring a suspicion of feminism. George Curzon was as responsive as a Latin foreigner to womanhood. With him appreciation of their charm came before the national love of sport.

The Indian task was colossal, and he would have sunk beneath it, had he not continually remembered that he himself was a colossus. He sated his soul by an occasional gesture of imaginative power. His attitude was omnipresent, and omnipotent. The multitudinous mind of India was made to feel the rule of one. Right and left he interfered. The Presidencies of Madras and Bombay had the right to

correspond with the Secretary of State in Whitehall behind the Viceroy's back. This was intolerable, and Curzon was quick to detect the use of " whimsical and foolish independence " in Madras. He developed " long and disputatious " argument with the Governor of the Punjab. What were Governors to stand in the way of the Viceregal car ? Curzon wished his progress to combine the elegant distinction of a barouche in Hyde Park with the majestic terror inspired by the Juggernautian vehicle. There would not, because there should not, be any resistance to his wishes. Lady Curzon believed that he was divinely protected from making mistakes. Her only hesitation was whether the sphere of India or England offered him his appointed zenith. For the time Curzon and India stood instrumental to each other for Fate.

Anglo-Indian officials evoked the Viceregal satire. Curzon described one of them as " resembling a gravestone with a moustache hung on in place of an inscription, and a wife like a custard pudding ". The wife of an offending Governor was a formidable Lady Young, who considered her husband as essential to India as Lady Curzon thought hers. By some blunder Curzon was placed in a box next to her at theatricals, whereat his instant humour recorded " a medusa-like bow which would have frozen most people to stone ". These Presidencies offered brain-racking problems, but then Curzon had come to India to solve knot upon Gordian knot. There were many questions which could hardly be appreciated or even

## LORD CURZON

known at home: “Bengal is too large. Ought Chittagong to continue to belong to it? Is Orissa best governed from Calcutta? Ought Ganjam to be given to Madras?” These questions Curzon was fitted and willing to solve, but when Bengal came to be divided, it was as the partition of a swinging wasp’s nest by the edge of a scimitar.

His concept of duty roused storms which he described as an “endless typhoon”. He was whirled along in “a whirlwind of calumny and fiction”. He was determined to hold the scales equally between black and white. He vindicated this imperial sense of discipline at Rangoon. A native woman was outraged and the offending regiment was banished to the torrid rocks of Aden. A deftly-worded circular forbade the native Princes to travel outside India. The unwritten reasons were good, but it was suggested that the King had as much right to forbid the English Dukes rioting at Monte Carlo. Curzon forbade the Maharajah of Holkar to travel with a retinue in time of scarcity. Deprived of his special train, the wily Prince bought a hundred tickets on an ordinary train, and travelled with his suite as before. The imminence of Famine did not prevent the Viceroy himself “standing on a golden rug with a silver throne behind him” at the Lucknow Durbar. His idolatress approved, but her eye travelled beyond what was merely gorgeous. She perceived that he was the only man living who was “writing *choses faites* on the slate of time. It is perfectly magnificent”.

## SUBLIME FAILURES

And she endeavoured to match magnificence by wearing a peacock dress.

The opportunity of supreme splendour was approaching. Queen Victoria had been gathered to her Albert. An Imperial Durbar was foreshadowed. Curzon laid restless plans with one great and benign view: to outdo and utterly surpass Lord Lytton's Durbar a quarter of a century before. The pomps and vanities of Lord Lytton must be as dust upon the paths of yesterday. Lord Curzon's should remain a light to lighten the official memory of Ind for ever. Events approached, and Curzon was ready for them. The Prince of Wales had become King of England instead of remaining Comte de Paris. Salisbury had been succeeded by his icy and amiable nephew, Mr. Balfour, in the Premiership. Curzon had no fears, for at 40, he was already amongst the mighty of the earth. The appearance of Mr. Balfour in Downing Street can only have been received by Curzon with an amused tolerance or at most with an Old Etonian's pleasure in the honour paid to the old School. Gladstone, Rosebery, and Salisbury had been Etonians. Balfour was another. They were all Prime Ministers. Curzon also was Etonian, and he could hope to match himself with Balfour, as he had matched himself with Mr. Hope Hawkins for the Arnold. He sent an appreciative telegram as Viceroy to the Head Master on the Fourth of June.

Yet this Arthur James Balfour was worthy of deep consideration. He touched nothing superficially in

## LORD CURZON

life except golf-greens. His mind loved the metaphysical. He had avoided life's pomps and vanities, but they continually floated to his feet. He had given no hostages to Destiny. It was Destiny who submitted her moves from time to time to him. He had never been interested in ruling East or West. Ireland was the only foreign country he had personal knowledge of. But he had travelled far beyond the bournes of Curzon's flimsy creed, and had returned in favour of a deeply cogitated philosophical belief. He was the antithesis to Curzon. He made no noise and he harboured no ambition. He did not seek the great prizes nor run the risk of the great follies. He also served the British Empire, but with singular detachment. He regarded it as the best means for ordering a large fraction of a world, which had emerged from one ice age and was rapidly returning to another. The whole human episode struck him as slightly disreputable. It would never have occurred to him to attribute intimations of immortality to British Institutions such as the Foreign Office or the Authorized Scriptures or the Indian Empire or to George Curzon himself. He was content to be an observer of the great game, which the Fates play with such smiling scorn. So impersonal was his bearing, and so studied his detachment, that the Inexorable Ones seemed to enjoy giving him an occasional hand in the game.

Meantime Curzon played Nabob and grand Mogul and the great Sophy and the Shah Jehan to his heart's

## SUBLIME FAILURES

content. Moreover, he was not without a little tinge of Tamerlane, for he had an Indian frontier policy of his own. He was prepared to make conquests, and it was his duty not to flinch from blood. After exhibiting the splendours of peace, he was ready to try the chances of a campaign. He set his eye fixed and imperious upon such neighbours as the bellicose ruler of Afghanistan or the contemplative guide of Tibet.

The splendours of benevolent despotism were organized on generous lines. He threw himself into the restoration of India's architectural past. Vandalism was smitten hip and thigh. He forbade anyone to "restore, repair, touch, obliterate, or deface" the beautiful Mogul buildings. He would not allow a railway the "sacrilegious luxury" of piercing the outer wall at Delhi. The Queen's Palace at Mandalay he extricated from the clutches of the Upper Burma Club, and released King Thebaw's throne room from the indignity of being used as a garrison Church. Before the Taj Mahal he bowed with effortless veneration. His senses of religion and of great buildings were equally touched. A silver lamp was swung in the dreamlike spaces of the world's most lovely sepulchre to mark his loving approval. The lamp was the fruit of "years of patient search, pious thought, and personal labour". Perhaps long after British rule is a superb memory of the past, curious archaeologists will decipher the name of the Viceregal donor from the old Persian script. As Rossetti's *Blessed Damosel* was his favourite poem, the Taj was

## LORD CURZON

his favourite building on earth. He saluted the “grave and potent religion of Islam”. Creeds which built so beautifully could not be ignoble. Of the faith of Buddha he wrote finely that it “made white lives and brought tearless deaths, almost Christianized idolatry”.

Curzon decided that the Durbar should be unrepeatable in cost alone. He even wished to entice King Edward to crown himself in India. This was refused by prosaic statesmen at home. Reasons could be imagined. Canada might suggest a Canadian coronation amid a monster skating carnival. Australia might demand the royal presence in royal robes at a Test Match in Sydney. Curzon had to play King and Emperor to himself. He was Oriental enough to wish the Durbar to be associated with a remission of taxes. Again the Cabinet refused, for the Constitution does not allow bribery as a Royal prerogative. Curzon cabled invoking the King direct, and the Cabinet grew grave. At the eleventh hour there was a compromise. It was the beginning of many disputes and tussles with home to be followed by petty repulses or petty victories until the final break.

For the moment all went very magnificently. Curzon believed that strongly written words would always bring the Indian Council at Whitehall to heel. He made England bear the expense of the Indian contingent at the Coronation, and wrote delightedly to Lady Curzon: “By a single strong dispatch and a little courage, I defeated them all.” He was left to

## SUBLIME FAILURES

carry his plans both meticulous and magnificent to success. What was the opinion of the Indian Council to him, as he set forth upon a State elephant, which had been bangled and painted like Jezebel? Enthroned beside him sat Lady Curzon, her alabaster complexion shielded by a gigantic state umbrella. The Orient is trained to appreciate pageantry as one of the coloured illusions of what Europeans call Time. Alas ! that the Cabinet headed by the frigid Balfour and the Indian Council could not witness that triumph. It was an era of Jubilees, and Curzon was giving the world its last great spectacle. The only fly in that savourous ointment was the Ninth Lancers. This regiment had been severely castigated by the Viceroy for the murder of a native cook. While he sat to receive the salute, he became aware that in spite of their studied unsmartness they were rousing the wildest applause. Every cheer was intended as a groan for the Viceroy. Even the Viceregal party cheered, but Curzon sat on his horse unflinchingly “conscious of the implication of the cheers”. What Curzon held for right let Curzon hold !

At a fancy dress ball to crown the revels, Curzon appeared as his predecessor Lord Wellesley, half a Sultan, half a Peer. Calcutta became his favourite city. He purged her of smoke, and adorned her with the mighty Queen Victoria Memorial. “The Imperial Library will be one of the monuments of my time,” he noted. There were then to be others.

When he returned to his duties, he realized that he

## LORD CURZON

was becoming worn, although he still hoped that love and duty were redeeming merits "in an otherwise grim personality". He found it more difficult than ever to be bending, especially in an iron corset. He was suffering great pain and became fretful. The strain would not permit him to stand long on his feet. But the tale of works was never relaxed. He passed through the new Frontier Province and held Durbar at Peshawar. The Nizam of Hyderabad was approached on the question of Berar. By treaty the Berar revenues paid for military charges and the surplus was handed to the Nizam. This was made a fixed sum. The Indian Government became a paying tenant instead of a military bailiff. Curzon had settled what was "a standing sore for fifty years". And he reflected: "I have persuaded the Nizam, but who at home knows of Berar?" His old Eton friend, St. John Brodrick, was now Secretary at Whitehall, and still the Indian Office was lacking in appreciation. They caused the Viceroy infinite trouble. Mr. Balfour was severely told that he had never served his country in foreign parts. Curzon added that Proconsuls' hearts had been broken from Warren Hastings to Bartle Frere. "Do you wish to repeat the performance?" Isolated and harassed and weary, Curzon bitterly upbraided the home officials for desiring "to thwart and hamper me". He felt that he was being nagged, impeded, and misunderstood. The truth was that they generally allowed him three-quarters of his way, but that he was made frantic not

## SUBLIME FAILURES

to have the whole. His iron corset chaffed his soul. "You have reduced Bombay to indignation," he wrote on a particularly irritating occasion, "and the Government of India to righteous fury." What was the good of a Council who thought that "a Boundary Commission at Aden could be worked from Downing Street?"

What grated him fiercest was the Cabinet's failure to support his foreign policy. He was facing Afghanistan and Tibet. In Eton debating days he had expressed fears of Russia's encroachment in the East. It was his duty now to prevent her attaining a maritime terminus through Persia. Peter the Great's Testament willing Russia to break outlet at the sea still haunted the English mind. The Crimean War was not really over. European wars never end. Is the Franco-Prussian War over? Curzon was holding up Russia as his father's generation had held her up before Sebastopol. Besides, Persia was the hobby of his youth. Suddenly the Amir died, and the outposts of two Empires braced themselves. This was in October, 1901.

In past days Curzon had forced a visit on Kabul. The Amir, who had known him as an aspirant for the hand of the Queen, had been startled by his return to the East as her Viceroy. He could only suppose that his courtship was beginning to be successful. He also remembered confiding his suspicions of the Indian Government to his wily guest. He therefore took no steps towards a friendly approach. Curzon

## LORD CURZON

took steps and chose an envoy not wholly useless to himself, but the Amir declined him on the serious score of "atheistic opinions". He was willing to be England's ally, but on condition that England sent munitions and not men. The Amir sat back in his mountains, and the Cabinet refused to allow him to be drawn. They were still dealing with President Kruger in the kopjes of Africa. Curzon could only see the East and vainly wrote : "If you do not like to tackle Russia then at least punish the Amir. If you allow a man and a State of his calibre to flout the British Empire then we had better put up the shutters." The Amir made up his mind never to visit the Viceroy, and he never did. It was not a question of bringing Mahomet to the mountains, for Mahomet had wrapped himself in the mountains until the day of his death. Curzon wrote : "The great crisis has arrived. I have always had a sure premonition that it would happen in my day." He wrote to Brodrick of his intent "at all hazards to defend British interests". Unfortunately hazards were more apparent in South Africa. The prolonged South African War crippled Curzon's Indian policy and the ears of harassed statesmen at home were closed.

A new Amir ruled in place of the old, but like the old, nothing would entice him to meet the Viceroy at Peshawar. The obstinate fly declined a parlour invitation. He took refuge in precedents. The flouted Viceroy received no help from home. Lord Selborne wrote of England's overpowering needs. It was "a

## SUBLIME FAILURES

terrific task to remain the greatest naval power". How was it possible to meet "the greatest military power in Asia" as well, for Russia lay behind Kabul. When Curzon's draft treaty reached Kabul, the Amir produced his own. In flowery Persian it settled everything as they were. The Amir proposed to renew his father's engagements. His ground was unimpeachable, and from the point of view of artillery, unscalable. The Cabinet supported the Amir. Curzon was left with the slight satisfaction that the Amir's success improved his temper towards those whom he had defeated diplomatically. Unlike Faith diplomacy could not move the hills.

Then the Persian question was always present. At one time the Order of the Garter was mooted for the Shah. Curzon was not in favour of extending the leading Order of Christian chivalry to the heathen, although the Mikado of Japan might be considered a precedent. His Navy had certainly reached Christian proportions, and equipment. So efficient a country had to be offered the sugar-plums of courtesy, but smaller countries, which had made poetry or the fine arts their first pursuit, could be safely bullied. "We have many ways of making ourselves nasty to the Persians," wrote the Viceroy. Mixed dealings led to mixed results. The Shah was not given the Garter in England as he had wished. It was sent after him as a feeble afterthought. The Shah showed a prompt sense of the indignity and made an agreement with Russia. It was exactly what Curzon expected, and he

## LORD CURZON

enjoyed watching his enemies in Asia score off his critics in Europe. When the Foreign Office began to discuss the partition of Persia, he commented that "a patchwork programme will go the way of all patchwork quilts". When Russian and French gun-boats began to appear in the Gulf, it was necessary to make naval displays and an unfortunate ship on leave from the China station was commandeered. Though the Cabinet were still deep in their "South African imbroglio" as he called it, Curzon set out to Muscat with six warships, "a spectacle such as the Muscatis can never before have witnessed." An even rarer sight was vouchsafed at Bahrein, where the water was shallow, and the Viceroy was faced by the alternative of being carried ashore or arriving on the back of a donkey. His biographer does not record the manner adopted. In any case, the Persians never knew whether they were being conquered or amused. On one occasion there were only six swords to be presented amongst seven Sheiks. Curzon threw in a valuable watch which he handed to the seventh, who cast it on the decks and left the Viceroy speechless.

In the end, Curzon thought better of harassing the Amir, and looked Eastward. He perceived Tibet, which was largely a religious community, and presented less difficulties. The Dalai Lama was not eager to meet the Viceroy or his wishes, but Curzon was bent on sending a mission. He had sensed an area of Russian intrigue, and he believed he was the

destined thorn in the bear's pad. The Cabinet still feared "international complications" and refused a mission to Lhasa. Mr. Balfour wrote a letter which "rather pained" him. Russia denied that she had any agreement with Tibet, so a Conference was arranged. The Conference was for the benefit of both Chinese and Tibetans, but strangely neither made appearance. The Cabinet then reluctantly sanctioned an advance. Diplomacy in Europe was in the blind throes of settling whether Russian conscripts should leave their bones in the mountain passes of India or on the marshes facing Prussia.

Curzon seemed anxious to entice them to the former. For him Russia was still the hereditary foe. When Russia taxed Indian tea, he wished to tax Russian petroleum. Still the Cabinet preferred caution to tariffs. Peace in our time is always the prayer of the weary bellicose. Only Curzon's insistence sent the troops to Lhasa. The missionaries brought both peace and the sword. The Tibetans attempted to stem the invader, and suffered 600 casualties. "The whole affair looks woefully like a massacre," noted the Viceroy. Perhaps Xerxes thought the same, when he received news of the 600 killed at Thermopylæ. Lhasa was occupied and the Tibetans had the grace and wisdom to make terms with the adherents of more successful gods. They were charged seventy-five lakhs for receiving their baptism of fire, a sum which was reduced by the conscientious Cabinet. The Dalai Lama had been forced to become friends,

## LORD CURZON

but the Amir still refused to leave Kabul, even for the pleasure of seeing Lord Ampthill, who was left in charge of India during the Viceroy's necessary visit home in order to make speeches and spur the dull Cabinet. Curzon had made admirable proposals which were "invariably gutted by the Cabinet who don't know the A.B.C. of Afghan politics". Nobody did except the Amir. In vain were Treaties and *aide-mémoires* drafted and sent to him. He refused to be entreated or to have his memory aided.

Curzon vented his disappointments in work. Eight different reforms were engaging his attention. Weary nights followed tiring days. Exhaustion and pain were met by courage and devotion. Agonies of depression befell him. Where indeed was he to make history? He wrote of himself descending the ages as only "a first-rate organizer, a magnificent State Barnum, an Imperial Buffalo Bill?" He became estranged from friends at home, "whose apparent willingness to break my career" rather bewildered him. He applied himself fiercely to the study of Famine and rainfall and irrigation, though he seemed to be asking "to wrest the keys of the Universe from the hands of the Almighty". Indian politics depend upon a barometer, which is not dependent upon Admiral Fitzroy's remarks. The supreme power is vested in the rain. Curzon let the distribution of the waters weigh upon his mind. . . . "What Cherrapungi could easily spare, Rajputana cannot for all the wealth of Croesus obtain. Sometimes it flows down

## SUBLIME FAILURES

in blind superfluity through a country already intersected with canals. Sometimes it meanders in riotous plenty through alluvial plains where storage is impossible.” The greater his difficulties, the more fluently he faced them. His State papers were marked with rhetorical eloquence. Cogency was his mistress, and antithesis was his Muse. Burke and Macaulay seemed to glance over his shoulder, while secretary after secretary sank exhausted on the steps of his throne.

He returned “in every accent of agony and denunciation” to the question of dividing Bengal. He knocked the native papers silly and gasping. He had raised “almost unparalleled unanimity of feeling”. He feared not the Bengali, but he discovered that public opinion was beginning to exist. He could not “ignore the great change which is passing over this country”. He worked ceaselessly to preserve his personal memory. He was not content with buildings by which he would be remembered. He turned with feverish devotion to the more lasting monuments of the past: “buried cities, undeciphered inscriptions, casual coins, crumbling pillars, and pencilled slabs of stone.” He visited the relics of the dead as “a pilgrim at the shrine of beauty”, and he was not content until he had restored them “as a priest in the temple of duty”. He repaired Agra. He adorned Calcutta. He expelled the garrison from historical buildings like unclean starlings roosting in sanctuaries. He set free the Pavilion and Mosque and withdrew

## LORD CURZON

tombs from destruction. When he restored the tomb of Humayan, he found that during his absence in England it had been planted with turnips. "Woe betide the Deputy Commissioner!" His heart grew softer towards Indians, who feared and abused him, than towards friends who liked but checkmated him. His great policies still received no support, and he was undermined behind his back. All he knew was that God was behind British India. Day and night the divine finger was pointed at him, and he could not resist the sombre searchings of his heart: "Whither are we leading them? What is it all to come to? What is the goal?"

There was a "real Indian people" and he was trying to receive and influence their inarticulate cries. India must proceed to higher and freer ways, but under his chosen oriflamme. Curzonian righteousness should exalt Indian nationalism. He addressed the Calcutta University on the subject left open by Pilate. He described Truth as a "Western conception" and the reverse to "Oriental diplomacy". But the wily Bengali were alive to English virtues. A storm was ignited, and it was pointed out that he himself had once untruthfully allowed an Oriental ruler to believe that he was aspirant to the hand of Queen Victoria!

Neither the Amir nor the Dalai Lama were to be final instruments in Curzon's fate. Since the closing months of 1898 two figures only had crossed the Imperial limelight: Kitchener at Khartoum and Curzon on the threshold of the East. So wide were

their orbits that it seemed unlikely their orbs would ever clash. For the few years following they were too busy to lend thought to each other. But the Fates noticed the swash-buckler clearing up the farm-republic and the popinjay, which crowed defiance at the Afghan raven, and pecked the unfortunate pigeon of Lhasa, and planned to bring them together.

Kitchener emerged from South Africa as the strong man of Empire. His next sphere was as Commander-in-Chief in India. Curzon welcomed so strong a background to his own aims and powers. He had found the Governors of Provinces a difficult team. Kitchener had the Major-Generals under his thumb, but he coveted more systematic power. Lord Ronaldshay notes at this juncture that "an even blacker cloud made its appearance upon the summer sky". Was it possible that India was too small to hold them both? At first Curzon viewed the gambols of this gallant soldier "with interest and some amusement". There had been agreement while Curzon realized good-humouredly that "of course as yet he does not know the ropes". Later Kitchener knew them too well, and Curzon could only hope he would entangle himself in them. With some alarm and less amusement, he observed him "just like a caged lion stalking to and fro". It seemed impossible that he should be rocking the Viceregal throne, and he watched this lonely and ignorant bully with withering contempt: "a molten mass of devouring energy and burning ambitions without anybody to

## LORD CURZON

control or guide it.” Kitchener was challenging the Military Member on the Viceroy’s Council, and proposing to take away the entire command. Curzon described how “these two turkey-cocks fight out their weekly contests, each clamouring to get me on his side, and threatening resignation”. He remained “a mortified but helpless spectator”.

Kitchener had one overwhelming weapon. He knew what Mr. Balfour knew, that he could cause the Government to fall. The Cabinet was haunted by fear of Kitchener’s resignation. That fear flittered at the back of all their correspondence. In face of Russia it was Kitchener, not Curzon, who was indispensable. Russia could discount Curzon. Even the Amir had defied him. Of the Military Member they had never heard. But they were afraid of Kitchener. He sounded a little like Ivan the Terrible. After Russia had been drawn into hopeless war with the Japanese, Kitchener became “increasingly restless”. He proposed to expand the army into a force that could move beyond the frontiers. But the command must be invested in himself. Curzon found him as impenetrable to argument as the Amir. Like the Amir, he gambled on the Cabinet failing Curzon, and like the Amir he proved right.

During his visit to England, Curzon declined to inquire into military affairs. “I saw no reason for destroying the whole system to please Kitchener.” But the Cabinet saw reasons. It would have been merciful though stunning to Curzon’s pride to have

## SUBLIME FAILURES

revealed the truth that he was replaceable, and Kitchener was not. Brodrick and Curzon wrote sheaves to each other. Brodrick's criticisms were soothing, and their Eton friendship was remembered. Theirs was the correspondence between a Quixote ruling the Indies with his Sancho Panza at Whitehall. It was described as an exchange between the most tactless man in Europe and the most tactless man in Asia. The pity was that Brodrick was not tactless enough to tell Curzon straight that he was the ornament and Kitchener the pillar of the British Government in India.

The Cabinet acted with multiform cowardice. They did not dare to break with Curzon, while they thought the country was behind his frontier policy. They made Kitchener their stalking horse and waited till he had won public opinion for them. Curzon returned to India to wage a fight that was lost in advance. Kitchener's gruff silences and moods vanquished the sweet discursiveness of Oxford. The struggle was immediate. Kitchener's scheme was rejected by all in the Council except by Kitchener himself who sat "brooding and silent". Unconsciously he followed the tactics of the Amir. Curzon wrote an elaborate dispatch. Kitchener appended word that his own arguments "remain uncontroverted and are I believe incontrovertible". Kitchener's satellites wrote a volume of criticism which was secretly sent to England. Brodrick then produced "a genuine solution", which was as simple as painting a red rose

## LORD CURZON

white to meet horticultural emergencies. The Military Member was to become a civil member forthwith. But it left Kitchener supreme. Curzon noted piteously: "A disembowelled Military Member has been left to prevent me from resigning."

Kitchener had thrown his Generals into a question of State. Curzon still argued politely: "I think, since you ask me, that your reference to the Generals was irregular, though I am sure that you never meant it in that light. I will explain what I mean" . . . and much else of explanation for Kitchener's waste-paper basket. Kitchener never explained what he meant. He got it done. The Indian Generals had denounced the old system and their views were appearing in the English papers. Curzon read them with despair: "How one sickens of all this underhand game!" and to Lady Curzon he wrote, "he is moving Heaven and earth to gain his ends. If you were here you might be able to exercise some influence on this wayward and impossible man." But Kitchener was unsusceptible to either wisdom or beauty. The Cabinet were now crawling behind their stalking horse, but Curzon could not realize their treacherous policy towards him. Brodrick, he thought, should be supporting him, and he turned bitterly against him. Brodrick should have been loyal to their Eton days. Pride and bitterness blurred Curzon's vision. He had intended to point Kitchener like a howitzer against the Amir. But Kitchener had turned into a blunderbuss and exploded in his hands. He sat there unresponsive and

## SUBLIME FAILURES

unintellectual, wayward and impossible, no more Etonian in spirit than the Amir. But he knew what he was about and afterwards described his whole affair with Curzon as like a play.

The end was coming. The Cabinet allowed Curzon to overreach himself. Brodrick received a letter causing him "positive pain". He replied soon after with the famous Dispatch of 31st May, 1905. Curzon was deliberately slighted, and the Indian Government overruled. Curzon read the Dispatch, and cut Brodrick out of his life and letters for ever. He had committed an unforgivable sin against the Old School. He had given away his friend to his enemies. Perhaps Brodrick felt bound by closer ties to the Cabinet. And Mr. Balfour in the Olympian background—was he not his chief, was he not also an Old Etonian? For a year Mr. Balfour had been giving anxious attention to the question in all its bearings, and he had reached his decision.

Curzon conceded Kitchener's triumph, but he hoped to be irreplaceable himself. He made his last effort and sent in modifications of the scheme. They were explained to Kitchener by a military minion, General Duff. To Curzon's slight bewilderment, Kitchener accepted them. The Cabinet were more than bewildered. They were aiming at his fall, and they were annoyed. They had sent a Dispatch which *The Times* thought "unnecessarily harsh". Curzon had thought it unnecessarily impertinent, but he had kept his temper and his throne. The Cabinet had

## LORD CURZON

allowed Kitchener to harass and humiliate him. When he taxed Kitchener with disloyalty in throwing his resignation into the scales, Kitchener replied that Curzon could do the same. His scheme was practically the seizure of the military power. Curzon parried with modifications and when Kitchener accepted them, the Cabinet imagined that they must be in agreement with their own Dispatch. They were afraid to strike down the Viceroy. They left that to Kitchener, for any agreement between the two men was the last thing they desired. The modifications were found to bear several interpretations. There was one interpretation rendered by Duff to Kitchener and there was the Curzonian interpretation. But of what avail the exploring subtlety of the Viceroy's brain? The Cabinet had decided long ago to render unto Kitchener the things that were Kitchener's. Then Curzon's patience broke, and he resigned hardly knowing whether the venture would tell. The Cabinet had excelled him in patience, and they leaped out of their ambush. Curzon's resignation and Curzon's successor were announced on the same day. Their haste was unseemly enough to betray their pleasure. The play was at an end.

Political resignation is always a mistake unless a weary minister wishes to retire and make his soul. Curzon's soul had never been so ardent, and he felt young enough to come back. Having ruled the East with measurable brilliance he set out for the West. . . . He was inclined to let the force of his

## SUBLIME FAILURES

displeasure fall upon Brodrick. He had not noticed Mr. Balfour on the heights like the famous shadow which is thrown by Adams Peak in Ceylon and which the Viceroy had once investigated with such interest. The Curzonian Viceroyalty had been an interesting experiment on the part of Salisbury, and his nephew had taken the occasion to bring it to a close. Few public men were more different from each other, so different and distant that Curzon never suspected Balfour of watchful waiting. Balfour never criticized Curzon, but when chance offered, he assigned him silently and inevitably to his doom. The two statesmen represented the nearest that the Conservative Party could produce to leadership out of the blood of gentlemen. As a rule that Party borrows its leaders from other classes. Balfour was an exception, and Curzon hoped to be another. They were in considerable contrast. Curzon could convince himself, but not always others. Balfour could persuade others, but could he really convince himself? Balfour was a philosopher, who descended to politics: Curzon a politician ascending to philosophy. In spite of his garnished statements Curzon seldom faced a decision. With less knowledge Balfour could seize the point where a decision was vital. Balfour lived for Thought with leisurable intervals. Curzon, too restless to enjoy sport or games, revelled in the superficialities of life. While Balfour assumed the invulnerable philosophy of unambition, Curzon wore the habiliments of a Crusader. Men thoughtful and philosophic

## LORD CURZON

survive to reap the resignations of the idealists and the arrogant. Salisbury had once waited with a net for Randolph Churchill's and now his nephew with fine invisible gut had drawn Curzon flopping in his silver scales to the bank. So swiftly had the line been drawn that he never realized that he had been trapped in his own waters. Curzon used to be compared to Aristotle's type of the magnanimous or high-souled man. Balfour was one of Plato's company of Sophists sitting on the Treasury Bench.

India experienced tremors from Curzon's resignation, but there were no instruments in England to register their seismic importance. He passed from India amid the hostility but admiration of Bengal. Native India understood as little as official India of the lonely and lofty man, who had made a religion of his work. It meant a downright and merry victory for the military over the civil power. Kitchener had come, intrigued and conquered. Ten years later the hide-bound General Duff carried the new military system over the frontiers into the unimagined disasters of the Mesopotamian campaign.

When Curzon was first appointed, Wilfrid Blunt had written wishing him to become the best and the last of the Viceroys. Words written in jest but true in a sense. Enemies will concede that he was among the best Viceroys and it does not require partisanship to place him as the last of the great ones. *Ultimus Britannorum!* He was succeeded by a succession of caretakers deprived of his personal and brilliant

## SUBLIME FAILURES

initiative, and historians are at a loss how to emblazon their reigns. Their names are remembered chiefly as the leaders while leadership in India passed from the white to the dark. Macaulay could have devoted such an Essay as he gave to Clive or Warren Hastings to George Curzon. He would have found sufficient gold to powder his page and purple rich enough to tincture his ink. Students of Hindustan will gladly recall the sympathetic subtlety of a Reading or the ascetical humility of an Irwin, but the Indian Princes and peoples will remember the name of Curzon as one who ruled India. It is said that Viceroys were expected to keep their watches in time with two latitudes. But let Curzon keep the time that Curzon kept !

Curzon returned to England for ever in December, 1905. The Cabinet resigned the following day, and he had the slight gratification of seeing the pillars fall about his head. It was not on Curzon's account that they fell. The Conservatives had to give an account of their stewardship and Chamberlain, their Samson, had wrecked their own Temple. Six years before Curzon wrote : "I wish that Mr. Chamberlain would not make speeches about sands in the hour-glass." Chamberlain had since shaken the hour-glass rather vigorously. The sands were running fast, and Chamberlain had been carried away with them. Mr. Balfour had rightly withdrawn from what he took to be quicksands, leaving the unfortunate Cabinet to swim or walk as they chose. Curzon had expected

## LORD CURZON

to be met with some show of political sorrow or sympathy. He observed signs of neither. There was only Mr. Balfour "eternally pirouetting on an eternal dialectical wire". He had begun to suspect that this was a chilling influence on his own rosy prospects. He decided to refuse an English Peerage from Mr. Balfour's hands, which Mr. Balfour had apparently decided not to offer. As for Brodrick, he might meet and even merit God's forgiveness, but let Curzon hate whom Curzon hate. Kitchener he still viewed with educated contempt, and he left him to his own strange destiny. Kitchener returned from India, having secured his way. He wished to be sent to Egypt or Constantinople or to the Indian Viceroyalty, which he insisted King Edward had promised him. Though Kitchener was "vehement" in his claim and the King "almost torrid in the same direction", Lord Morley, who stood later in Brodrick's shoes, tried to fob him off with a trip round the world and a roving command from Malta. Before the trip was over, the King was dead and Kitchener refused Malta. In the end Russia drew him to his fate, but not as Curzon had once imagined from the East.

The first period of Curzon's career had been closed by his own act with a crash. He had proved himself courageous as only the physically weak are courageous. The return of an Indian Viceroy is like the home-coming of an Eton Captain of the Boats. He can never be so despotically great again. Curzon knew that he had been a great Proconsul. The return to

## SUBLIME FAILURES

public life was bound to be slow and even grievous, but at its end lay the Consulship. Of that he never doubted in his soul. But he foresaw a long interregnum and he would not allow the interval to be engaged in anything mean. He found faint pomps as Chancellor of Oxford and even renewed his adventurous youth as President of the Royal Geographical Society. But an irreparable blow had befallen him. His beautiful wife had died. He decreed that her memorial should be a shrine of beauty which only the years could complete. In a marbled chapel at Kedleston he caused the effigies of her and him to be carved in their eternal repose. The bright agony of his love was inscribed in a Latin which seemed to clash with a second marriage. It was a burning cry which seemed to melt the marble : “*qui jam-pridem amabat hodie amat cras amabit in aeternum amandam.*” Yet this was the scroll of no Southern lover but of one who had been a Victorian statesman. The memorial was slowly finished. It was as though a Gothic chantrey had been made to enclose an Arabian Night. Crimson velvet and silver lamps from Italy ; quartz from the Urals ; a lectern from Mexico, and grilles from Spain. In the quiet hills of Derbyshire the Viceroy built his Taj Mahal to the memory of a passion and a dereliction no less deathless than that of Shah Jehan.

Curzon was convinced of his high artistic knowledge. He took a restless interest in Architecture which he showed by restoring historic and

## LORD CURZON

stately mansions in England. He bought Bodiam Castle in Sussex and Tattershall in Lincoln as presents for the nation. He compiled monographs and made researches into British domestic history. He discovered amongst other details "an absence of nightgowns" in the past, but that the British Tub was common in mediaeval times, though as an outdoor sport. The restorer of the Taj lived to see an England of Bungalows begin to scab the green counties. He protested against the "monotony and monstrosity" of rural buildings. They resembled "a lot of bandboxes or canisters or dog-kennels". His outlook and his pursuits continued to befit the Consulship which could not be long delayed.

In these years his deportment became attuned to that of a waiting Premier. He accepted no position that was dangerous or undignified. His name was not given to schemes or companies or speculations, though his lavish mind needed money, and his name was worth a high purchase to financiers. He lived in England like a Nabob of the eighteenth century, and acquired some of the unpopularity which befell that vulgar class. He continued to cultivate his style and to seek parallels, historical and literary, from the Classics. Had he not once compared the fate of Gordon to that of Germanicus in Tacitus? He had a weakness for Herodotus, one of whose Delphic Oracles he used to deride Asquith's Irish Bill: "He has loosed a great kingdom." He must have been the first to compare St. Augustine of Canterbury with

## SUBLIME FAILURES

Mahinda, the Buddhist Apostle of Ceylon, that island which shared with Lesbos the discovery that “only man is vile”. But in spite of all his erudition and quickness there was less audience for him in the Lords and none in the nation. In the course of the general uplift which sweeps upward the high official world, he had become an Earl and nursed an almost mediaeval desire to become a Duke. He held a watching brief in the Lords for his own policy. Though he could always crush the new Indian Secretary Morley by his arsenal of experience, he could not carry the House. He spoke with convincing grandiloquence, but out of an era, which his own resignation had closed. He had accepted a great change of principle, subject to his own modifications. By now his modifications were nowhere. However sonorous and well-informed his speeches, they partook of the thoughts of a king in exile rather than of criticism from a retired Viceroy. He was more practical as an Oxford Chancellor, when he made decision whether the Galliambic metre was permissible for the Latin Verse Prize. He seemed doomed to drift with Lord Rosebery to the higher peaks of dilettantism. One great distinction lay between the two rhetorical aristocrats to the end. Of Rosebery it could be said, as of Galba, that all would have accounted him worthy of the highest place, unless he had occupied it. Fate made this saying impossible of Curzon.

The blind combinations of the Great War brought Curzon back to Office. At first he was able to do no

## LORD CURZON

more than assuage the feelings of fugitive royalties by hospitality at Hackwood. He entered the Coalition “ moved by forces almost outside personal control ”. He moved as in a dream. It was typical of his bewilderment with the present that he opposed the withdrawal of the army from Gallipoli on the precedent of the Athenian disaster at Syracuse.

The protagonists in his personal drama were once more on the scene. Morose and uncertain, Kitchener was directing vast armies, until the Cabinet, moved by blind Fate, threw him blindly at Russia. Kitchener never met Kerensky or perhaps he would have dealt with him as he once dealt with Curzon, like a marionette in a play. Balfour was directing the Navy. Curzon was given the Air Board, and there was an instant clash tempered by a lofty dialectic. Curzon indicted the Admiralty for failure in the air. Balfour dismissed his remarks as “ imaginary history ”. In the eighteenth century there would have been a bloodless duel in Hyde Park. The final conflict was postponed. Meantime, when any Oriental question appeared, Curzon proved his worth as an adviser. He knew the East as familiarly as Lloyd George knew the Welsh constituencies or Balfour the stately golf-courses of England. He proved his worth in Council again and again.

When Balfour proposed his scheme of Zionism, safeguarding the rights of Jew and Gentile and Moslem, Curzon pointed out that real Zionism was far different : “ If this is Zionism, there is no reason

## SUBLIME FAILURES

why we should not be all Zionists." As the scheme was worked in reality, it proved to be Joshua's invasion of Canaan under the British flag.

Patiently and wearily Curzon took his part in solving or watching others solve the mounting problems of the world. Those, who saw clearest, hesitated. Those, who were blindfold, plunged. There was a cynical vacillation in Curzon's character, and worse, he was liable to dramatic inconsistency. A gift for Fatalism covered the rifts in his character. Whether he had acquired it in the East or had found it in his complex, it robbed him of the solidity of a British statesman. The British public has learnt to trust and sometimes to love public men who were stupidly true to type. A halo of gossamer uncertainty played over Curzon. The public wish to be certain of a leader at the eleventh hour. Twice Curzon had carried out eleventh hour changes of face which remain unexplained. He had urged the Peers to vote against the Parliament Bill by which Asquith deprived them of their hereditary power. At the last moment Curzon abandoned those, he had advised, without apology or excuse. He felt the Continental sense of dislike to the suffrage of women. He foretold electoral catastrophe if the constituencies were flooded with balloting flappers. At the last moment he disdained to vote, and left the Anti-Suffrage League high and dry and dead. He applied the same Fatalism to India. Grimly and complacently he watched Lord Chelmsford on the throne of the Moguls with Edwin Montagu

## LORD CURZON

applying autonomy from Whitehall to lands, where despotism is not only understood but appreciated. He faced the new reforms with the attitude of Balaam, who was a quick-change artist in his Biblical day. While inclined to curse the reforms in practice, Curzon was not averse to blessing them in theory. For good or bad, self-determination had reached India. To expect immediate success was like expecting a ready-made dictionary of Esperanto to yield a Classic like the *Ænead*.

Stiffly arrayed in his corset of pain, Curzon awaited his hour. Only his watchful patience endured the partnership with Lloyd George or Balfour in foreign politics. “Balfour is in Paris pursuing one policy. I am here pursuing another.” Although he was installed at Whitehall, his life was worried by Turk and Greek, French or Soviets. He could not flick them like vermin from his portfolio. Absurd Conferences followed from city to city. He took wonderful care never to disagree with Lloyd George in the Cabinet. He felt little awe for one who was wicked as well as plebeian. It was as well that Balfour kept to the background, for Curzon noticed that he talked “atrocious French”, Diplomacy was not easy for England. She had disbanded her armies too eagerly and fallen back on the theory of “divine control of the Universe”, a theory France had discarded since 1870. Curzon was dragged from Conference to Conference. He afforded the spectacle of the old elephant, whose roaring had once disturbed

## SUBLIME FAILURES

the jungle, made part of a travelling circus with tusks sawed and the tinsel draperies of state thrown over his weary loins. Prodigious questions were presented to him which he dealt with in more prodigious detail. From afar he looked again upon his ancient love, Persia. Fear of Russia was greater there than hope from England, and he saw Persia drawn into agreement with the Soviet. The Egyptian Sphinx came up for judgment, and a British Protectorate gave way to a native monarchy. He favoured excluding the Turk from Europe, if only to restore Sancta Sophia to Christian worship. He was still liable to the *folie des grandes maisons*. He occupied a mansion in Carlton House Terrace. He was restoring Kedleston. He rented houses like Hackwood. He had restored the Taj. If he added Bodiam Castle and Sancta Sophia, what a splendid trio to send down the ages marked with his stewardship ! But he opposed the vainglorious and fatal assault of Asia Minor by the Greeks. As usual he found himself more right than wrong. With Smyrna in flames and the Greeks in the sea, it became Curzon's duty to extract the Greeks out of their adventure by diplomatic means. Meantime Mustapha Pasha had smashed the Treaty of Sèvres like porcelain. Through these variations of Chaos, Curzon waded with forbearance and industry.

The popular idea of Curzon was seldom right. Had it been more accurate, he might have been even more unpopular. His moody pomp and haughty pessimism would have been resented by a nation which

## LORD CURZON

made its motto *Cheerio!* It was rightly suspected that he disliked and despised all classes below his own. The Press, which can never afford to help unpopular men, deprived him of his credit won as Foreign Minister. Reluctantly he realized that he must look beyond History to be vindicated. In life there was only one vindication which he could tolerate, and only Fate could create the occasion. But there were many moments when a bright sunshine played through the clouds. Mr. Gregory has described in his reminiscences the charm and camaraderie he experienced at his first interview with his Chief, all of which was broken by passionate scenes with Secretaries and office-keepers as to how blinds should properly be drawn. Apparently "not by bits but at one go" explained the furious Minister. When he was not writing lucid expositions of Eastern Questions, he found time to pen "immense autograph complaints about the iniquities of the Hackwood rabbits".

In those days Foreign policy was a deadlock. Curzon was thwarted in the Cabinet, and the Cabinet was thwarted abroad. After the failure of Lloyd George to take a historic place with Byron and Gladstone as the phil-Hellenic Trinity, the Coalition was doomed. It became a question whether Curzon or Lloyd George should resign first. The Premiership promised vacancy. Curzon saw Bonar Law and gathered that he only wished to avoid that honour and quit politics for ever. But by the evening of the

## SUBLIME FAILURES

same day Bonar Law had had his mind changed for him. On the next day he was Premier. It was difficult to say whether the Carlton Club found him pliant or had ignited a last grain of ambition. Fate had moved him like a pawn, and blocked Curzon's path. Curzon had long believed that the hand of every politician was against him. But he believed in the royal favour towards him, and in his own uncontrovertible merits. He was disappointed, but he continued to add to his merits by remaining at the Foreign Office. He still appeared at Conference after Conference. Amid French Radicals and Turkish bandits he preserved the aroma of a Marquis of the ancient regime. Patient and subtle under his grand manner, he obtained advantages for his country. He enjoyed the turn of success. He wrote: "I was forgotten, traduced, buried, ignored. Now I have been dug up and people seem to find life and even merit in the corpse."

The Greek tragedy was consummated by state-executions. Gounaris finding himself near the scaffold produced his revealing letter to Curzon. It appeared as though Curzon had withheld vital information from the Cabinet, for no Minister remembered reading the letter. But Curzon's industry was not at fault, and copies were found marked "seen" by various Ministers. It was a curious moment in the history of the Foreign Office. As a result Curzon was left to deal with the triumphant Turks. Ismet Pasha put the case for annexing Mosul,

## LORD CURZON

hoping his audience was ignorant of the East. Curzon's rapier passed accurately through his flimsy pretences. It was claimed that the Kurds were Turks, but Curzon had once been the guests of the Kurds and remarked that "it was reserved for the Turkish delegation to discover for the first time in history that the Kurds were Turks". It was not until 1926 that the League of Nations confirmed the King of Irak at Mosul, but by then the English Foreign Secretary lay in his stately tomb.

He found himself face to face again with his old enemy in Afghanistan, and caused the Soviet representative to be withdrawn from Kabul. Mr. Gregory thinks he was near coming to an agreement with the Soviet. "He knew his Bolshevik well and he had big enough ideas to deal with him fairly and squarely. Lord Curzon received Krassin like a gentleman. He was in fact at his best. It was a great opportunity missed." The fact was that though classed as a blinkered aristocrat, Curzon was the best fitted of the Cabinet to take wide-world views. Little as he loved Ireland, he accepted the Treaty with Ireland with satisfaction. He saw the deep importance of reaching and keeping conclusions with the new Russia.

The sands were ever running through the hour-glass. In May, 1923, Bonar Law withdrew from the Premiership under the menace of cancer. He gave Curzon to understand that he would not nominate a successor to the King. Curzon withdrew into the country and waited. The hour for which he

## SUBLIME FAILURES

had planned all his life was at hand. For two years he had carried the list of his Cabinet Ministers in his pocket. He had watched the men by whom he was surrounded, and he had added or erased names. Greatly he had desired, greatly he had deserved to be Prime Minister. The fateful letter arrived from Lord Stamfordham requesting an interview. There seemed no doubt in the significance of Lord Stamfordham's handwriting on his table. It was Whitsuntide, and he made preparations to reach London immediately. His soul was lit with pride and joy, and some of his radiancy transferred itself to the reporters waiting to photograph the rising star. For a few hours he lived in the blissful apprehension that he was Prime Minister of England. He informed a Director of the Press, who happened to have an invitation to his table that day, that he was expecting the message to bring him to the King at any moment. He was in affable mood, and almost lavish with his high spirits. He outlined his policy. He thought it was time for England to be ruled by gentlemen. He had seen Democracy in high office. It was enough, and he had suffered enough.

The King's envoy arrived, and Curzon insisted that he should deliver his message in the presence of the second beautiful Lady Curzon. To his speechless amazement he learnt that Stamfordham had been thoughtfully sent by the King to intimate his exclusion from the highest office. The dream was not to be. The excuse rendered was that, as the Opposition was

## LORD CURZON

Labour, it was thought better that the Premier should be in the Commons to meet them. Such black swans as Labour Peers had not yet been devised. Curzon turned very pale, then recovering himself he offered to submit modifications of this view of the Constitution. But Lord Stamfordham had not come to debate, and cut him short in spite of his own intense pain. Comment was now impossible, for the choice of the King was already on his way to Windsor. Stamfordham had made due inquiries in the Conservative ranks.

Such was the end of the most dramatic moment behind the political scenes in our day. Yet Curzon's Premiership had not been such an impossibility. Bonar Law had not hindered it. The King had been perfectly prepared for it. Rather unnecessary reasons were afterwards put forward to account for his exclusion. He had offended all his subordinates. He was unforgiving in his prejudices. His aristocratic temper was bound to exasperate Labour. It was feared that he would dampen the Colonial Premiers. He was the sort of Premier who by a tactless speech would start the Revolution. None of these were valid reasons. It later proved a fact that he had dealt with the Soviet better than a Labour Foreign Secretary. He had made a greater impression on Colonial Premiers than any of his colleagues. Men like Mackenzie King were charmed by his manners but impressed by his intelligence. And secretly they preferred to be received by an obvious successor of

## SUBLIME FAILURES

Castlereagh than to be clapped on the shoulders by an equal. They found the deference of a Curzon more complimentary than the joviality of a Thomas.

It was not likely that the Throne should have played for safety. It was certain that the King would buttress himself upon advice. If Bonar Law did not give his advice, Mr. Balfour probably did. Once more the chilling shadow of the detached philosopher seemed to have passed across Curzon's dazzling path. This time it was final. The man who had ruled the East was forbidden sway in the West.

Then a great and purging grief swept over his proud soul. He uttered his feelings aloud : " Such was the reward I received for nearly forty years of public service in the highest offices ; such was the manner in which it was intimated to me." He was forbidden to aspire any longer to the height he had coveted for forty years. He was not aware that he had done anything to demerit it. But in civil as in ecclesiastical life it is the same. Premierships, like Primacies, are constantly and more safely conferred upon the mediocre than the brilliant. Here indeed was Curzon like a hart royal, which had been brushed by a stiletto in the dark. For some time he was numbed by the blow. At one moment even his loyalty reeled and he forgot that the King's act could not have been personal. Then he recollect ed that his enemies must not be allowed to guess his pain or witness an aristocratic sulk. All his life he had been learning to disguise pain. Life had nothing for

## LORD CURZON

him now except to be magnanimous and a Marquis. That same afternoon he presided as Chairman at a lecture on Historical Buildings. With a drop of acidity he suggested that some present might have come to hear the lecturer !

Next day he braced himself and went to the Carlton to propose his supplanter as leader of the Conservative Party. For his friends it was an occasion of despair, and even his enemies had compassion upon him in that hour. Whatever his feelings, he carried out his part with dignity. But he must have felt that, had he served his times as he had served his King, he would not have seen himself thrust aside. He was of the eighteenth century, and he had not bowed the knee to the twentieth. He smiled without showing the least embarrassment at the famous meeting at the Carlton. Stanley Baldwin smiled. Fate also smiled . . .

All that remained of Office for Curzon came in the nature of an aftermath. With supreme magnanimity he retained Office under the new Premier, but he continued like the dead aeronaut, whose plane continued to gyrate round and round in the air. His final mortification was to be superseded by Austen Chamberlain. He began to die. He assigned his Foreign Office record to history. He had combined the patience of a Tallyrand with the lonely patriotism of a Castlereagh. He was not of the calibre of Canning, and he would probably have wished to be like Palmerston. But he had served his country

## SUBLIME FAILURES

with all his diminishing strength and all his self-centred soul. His consolation prize was an insult. In November, 1924, he was made Lord President of the Council. In March of 1925 he died, after composing an elaborate and pompous Testament. He died of disappointment.

During those last days of anguish the romance of his Indian days came to comfort him. They all returned with undimmed lustre. In India he had exercised the power which he felt was his. There he had sat as ruler and judge, invoking moralities as eternal and inviolate as the Himalayas. There he had learnt to class popularity with the gaudy trash of the Bazaars. Whether he was regarded as a fiend or a god had been of no moment as long as he avoided leaving the impression of a puppet or a craven. He had incurred periods of odium from dark and from white races. He could imagine the line of Viceroys, which had led up to himself and the slow descent, which was bound to follow. He knew that his name marked the British zenith in the East, and that when his pageants and sorrows, splendours and defiance were forgotten, he would be remembered as he stood between famine and drought, between the civil and the military powers, between black and white, holding the bright sword of justice. He hoped that his memory would flicker like a silver lamp in the changeless mind of Asia. Had he not toiled ceaselessly through the tropical Indian nights? Had he not striven to be as the flame of a rush to that

## LORD CURZON

Continent, which again and again had lightened the world. There was a past which no man could take from him. Although the Calcutta, which he loved and glorified, was destined to lose her position, when the Princes and rulers went up to the shining newness of Delhi, he trusted that his statues would not portray a forgotten personality to the deserted capital.

The melancholy replica which has been erected to his shade under the plane-trees of Carlton House Terrace has conveyed nothing to London. But it is possible that his statues in India will one day be gathered into a Museum of Anglo-Indian antiquities and perhaps be regarded by the Bengali with the same awe with which the Christians regarded the surviving effigy of Marcus Aurelius.

When comparison is made with any such character in antiquity, the note of failure becomes uppermost in Curzon. His final discontent and consciousness in having lost the crown of his life reduces him from the stature of a Marcus Aurelius. But resemblances there were. Like him he looked out upon days of difficulty and dissolution, which made the Empire the religion of all who served her. Like the Emperor, he strove to respect the liberty of all under the Imperial glamour. He was imbued with the same love of history and antiquities. He also lived friendless and in exile, guarding the Empire borders during a golden pause of History. What Parthians were to Marcus Aurelius, Afghans were to

## SUBLIME FAILURES

Curzon. It was written that the Emperor dignified duty and shamed weakness and achievement. That also was the Curzonian ideal. Like the Stoic Emperor, Curzon had made himself superior to the pains which deflect ordinary men. But ambition left him with a vulnerable flank. He also was a Stoic, but not sufficiently. Both agreed in setting the pen above the sword. Curzon acknowledged most of the Emperor's views upon men and nature and the gods. On the values of fame and women their conclusions must have been different. From his pallet of pain Curzon wrote maxims of political power and skill. But the Emperor wrote beyond the Empire and his Evangel has lasted for all time. Curzon could not dissociate himself sufficiently from wealth to become a Sage. It was greatly needful to him. No lack of possessions and no political disaster could chagrin a Marcus Aurelius or in a lesser degree Mr. Balfour. But loss of the supreme power, when it was in his grasp, grieved Curzon to the death.

Failure may be accounted for by circumstances which have conveyed a crashing blow. But the easiest source to trace failure lies in the character. Curzon was not a complete man. He was a mosaic of several great men rather than a single great one. His Foreign Office career disclosed chips of Castlereagh and trimmings of Tallyrand. His Indian career did not call for comparison with the regular Victorian Viceroys, who took no initiative and made no mistakes. Perhaps he shared something with "Clemency" Canning,

## LORD CURZON

when he stood against the militarist for the natives. He was like Warren Hastings, a supreme framer of minutes and conductor of written controversy. Like Hastings on his return, he was disappointed of an honour which came to less men. Hastings had only hoped to become Lord Daylesford. Curzon's hopes had mounted higher. Curzon was sniped by anonymous journalists not by a Junius. Hastings was greater in the enemies he had made. There was no Burke or Sheridan to hammer Curzon's latent worth on the anvils of splendid vituperation.

Lord Clive again may be considered a greater man than Curzon, but both laid reforming hands upon the Anglo-Indian functionary. Only in their unhappy retirements did they approach each other: Clive building and planting stateliwise at Claremont, and Curzon restoring Kedleston to show a plebeian age what a nobleman's residence should be. Macaulay wrote of Clive that "he had now nothing to do and nothing to wish for. His active spirit in an inactive situation drooped and withered like a plant in an uncongenial air. The malignity with which his enemies had pursued him, the indignity with which he had been treated . . ." These were words which could have been applied to Curzon in his last months. The fact that he presents no clear parallel with any other career, but shares the facets of many, accounts both for his brilliancy and for his flaws.

His character, though not too deep to plumb, was

## SUBLIME FAILURES

a paradox presenting a running unreliability to Secretary or to colleague. He could pass rapidly from hysterical rage to bantering burlesque. He lived in an atmosphere of imprudent pride, but at unexpected moments he could show tear-moistened humility. Unbalanced as he was himself, he could balance the scales of Europe better than any man in the Government. Though his word was his bond in affairs of State, though his foreign dealings were impeccable, who would care to try financial conclusions with him in private life? His megalomania was insatiable. His position as a Trustee of the National Gallery convinced him that his knowledge of Art was unequalled in the British Isles. He believed that by his individual taste he could form and direct a school of painting. He thought it was due to his own importance not to allow a relative to go bankrupt. He was an Epicurean one moment and a Spartan the next. During a monsoon the Viceroy alone with his A.D.C. attended Divine Service. It was duty, not devotion. He took the Englishman's cold bath daily. He was last to bed and earliest to rise. Even during the sleepless hours he was always ready for an argument with the sleepy. He believed in fresh air and champagne as the cure of everything. He did not believe much in doctors because they could not cure his spine, and he would only submit to them when Death was already knocking at the door.

He could take larger views than any member of the

## LORD CURZON

Cabinet, yet there was no domestic detail he would not supervise. He chose the books for each guest's room, and if a volume was missing, there was an angry inquiry followed by correspondence. He dusted his own china and shook out his carpets, because it was waste of time to explain what he wanted to servants.

Mention must be made of a humour which was Rabelaisian and robust, though it did not include the slightest ridicule of his own person. His Note Books preserve some idea of what tickled his mind. He was vastly amused at Jeypore by an inscription which, owing to the displacement of a letter, read : "A Gal a Day." Even more so, when a lady relative chose for a wedding hymn one with the ominous lines :—

" Soon shall you and I be lying  
Each within our narrow bed."

Though he married twice below his class, as he sadly recognized, he was convinced each time that he had married the most beautiful woman in the world. To servants and the subservient he was as unpleasantly rude as he thought necessary. Even his angriest orders were delivered in flowery speech. Enemies, whom he could not properly insult, were cut out of his life. Those whom he could not crush with cold words he cut with a freezing shoulder. Even his splendid daughters fell under his ban. They should have been boys to carry his titles down the ages,

## SUBLIME FAILURES

or they should have achieved higher ones by marrying *en masse* into the Royal Families of Europe. But he found lesser grounds for staging vehement quarrels. He adopted the bearing without the excuse of a King Lear. Possibly a subconscious motive lay in his bitter anti-Feminism. Personally and vicariously he instructed them in the great scenes and characters of History.

He was a master of epigrams and a fashioner of flouts, but the effect when he spoke them was often drowned in his own fluency. He was the terror as well as the hero of his Secretaries. Harold Nicolson, like Mr. Gregory, has left an undying vignette. "Oh those Curzonian dissertations ! As if some stately procession proceeding orderly through *Arcs de triomphe* along a straight wide avenue : outriders, escorts, bands ; the perfection of accoutrements, the precise marshalling of detail, the sense of conscious continuity, the sense of absolute control."

And there had been forty years of this, and in the end for what ? An accumulation of physical suffering and mental disappointments. Curzon never faced the world four-square. Though he wore brighter armour than most men, though he was gifted with finer weapons than any of his contemporaries, there were chinks and gaps in his mail. His spinal discomfort developed undue sensitiveness, which led to irritation, insomnia, and moments resembling insanity. He was one of those, to whom rest is forbidden by temperament. He endured the agonies of the lost,

## LORD CURZON

when he was omitted from Office, only to enjoy the tortures of the damned when installed. The Premiership might have proved a thorny crown. Imprisoned behind barricades of red boxes, he worked hour by hour lit by the flickering flame of his ambition until he resembled a figure in Dante's Inferno. He was not English in his devotion to sheer study. He worked like the conscientious bureaucrat of foreign lands. One simile may suggest itself. Macaulay described Lord William Bentinck as "William Penn on the throne of the Moguls". Curzon was like Prince Albert thereon. He shared failure to be a sportsman with that Prince, and was condemned therefore in English eyes. For the same reason he failed to appeal to Peers or populace. He also lay under a suspicion, which he warmly encouraged, of being cleverer than any of his generation. As a young man he gloried in priggishness and in mature years he raised snobbery to real distinction. But any such failings would have been generally forgiven, had he been a sportsman, had he entered horses for the Grand National, had he slaughtered record numbers of grouse or graced the Jockey Club. If he had been a little more like Lord Lonsdale and a little less like Lord Chesterfield, he might have been Prime Minister of England. But he had not won the love of the people or the fellowship of his Peers.

Brilliance and paradox are only tolerated from English public men speaking after dinner with the excuse of a glass too much. In public life

## SUBLIME FAILURES

their nay is expected to be negative and their yea a yea. Curzon's paradoxes were not confined to light speech. They cross-threaded his life. As Mr. Gregory wrote : "He was notoriously a man of incredible paradoxes, munificence and stinginess, pomposity and roguishness, defiance and submissiveness." This is illustrated in the Sargent portrait which hangs in the rooms of the Royal Geographical. Although the man barely emerges from his costly raiment, he reveals a series of features which openly belie each other.

English statesmen are expected to make some shift at religion, if only for the sake of making their biographies popular in provincial libraries. Lord Ronaldshay allows as much as is possible to be glimpsed. It was impossible for Curzon to accept what seemed the crudity of his fellow-countrymen's creed. His attitude was that of the "Souls", an esoteric group limited to very high society in the Eighties. He wrote of "the so-called Holy Scriptures, a highly idealized branch of human literature. Jesus Christ takes his place alongside of Buddha". He described Heaven and Hell as "extra spice"! He had thought sincerely, if not deeply, and refused to rest on the cushions of comfortable hypocrisy. When he plunged into deep waters, he found it "savagely inscrutable" that there was a God somewhere behind it all. Mr. Gregory thinks that he was inspired by the Old Testament, in which he saw himself reflected as a Britannic Joshua sent to lead a chosen people.

## LORD CURZON

Since Sinai was flame-and-thunderless and the oracles of antiquity were dumb, it was possible that God spoke through England and that the Foreign Office was inspired to deliver Delphic advice to lesser nations. To one, who believed himself chosen even out of a chosen people, defeat was particularly bitter and traversed the deepest feelings of his soul. His outward religion lay in his career. Whatever gods there were, they had failed him ! Elsewhere he had laid no philosophy and he cherished no faith, upon which to fall, when he had been outmastered in the councils of men. Only a vague Spiritualism allowed him to believe that the dead await those whom they have loved. The miracle of man's conscious existence, the uniqueness of the Curzonian Ego : could it be cut short by accident ? This too was a serious thought. There was something in him, which must not be quenched by failure or mummified under a marble tomb. And so he faced Eternity.

Here was a man often ridiculous and futile, but at his rare greatest one of England's great men. His was no ordinary shade passing through the mists of death and oblivion. Some fading splendour of his pomp and power must have followed such strength of character into the next world. In some celestial jungle, poised upon the white elephant of Death with his Blessed Damosel at his side, we can imagine Lord Curzon entering the realm of the unimaginable. And if his companion were allowed to console him for his alleged unworthiness to rule the Empire, she might

## SUBLIME FAILURES

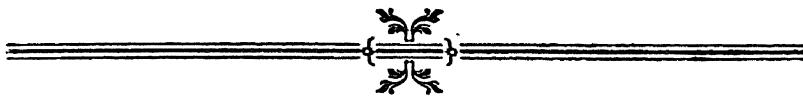
have pointed to an approaching stage of Empire, which was perhaps less worthy of his guidance.

For the present Lord Birkenhead's eulogy abides : “ Splendid in appearance, splendid in outlook, splendid in open-handedness, splendid in oratory, splendid in success, and on rare occasions equally splendid in failure.”

MORETON FREWEN

1853 - 1924





## MORETON FREWEN

IT is easier to ask who was Moreton Frewen than what is Bimetallism? For many years they were synonymous, and Committees sitting in Washington were used to being adjured to change their currency by "Mr. Frewen of England". For forty years he championed the cause of Silver Currency, living, dying, or dead.

Moreton Frewen sprang unexpectedly from an old Sussex stock watered with the extinct Northern blood of Laton and quartered with their cross-crosslets. Frewens of Brickwall bred a Royalist Archbishop of York, who dealt very simply with the Silver Question in his day by smelting the Oxford plate to meet royal needs. The Archbishop was entombed in the Minster, while others of his race await the Big Bugle in the mausoleum at Northiam. And there was Moreton gathered in 1924, after a life of animated adventure.

He was brought up under his father, an old Squire of the old school, who had been Member of Parliament while an undergraduate at Cambridge. He owned Innishannon in Cork and Cold Overton in Leicester. Indeed, Moreton was expected to fill the family living of Melton Mowbray. The old Squire used to eat sandwiches in his pew while keeping a

## SUBLIME FAILURES

grim eye on the Pope, and remembered his grandfather telling of Marlborough's funeral and stranger still of seeing the old housekeeper at Northallerton, who had seen Cromwell come in a hundred years before to say his prayers after the battle of Naseby. He had preferred to be the first Commoner in Sussex than accept a new-fangled Victorian Peerage. He died in 1870, distressed to the core by the rising portents of Free Trade and Papal Infallibility. It was a good year for English Squires to die. To Moreton he passed a younger son's portion, and his opinion that, but for gold discovery in Australia and California, Free Trade would have destroyed the landed interest. Moreton's mind turned to Currency and henceforth, when the adventures and pleasures of life allowed, he calculated the secret action of minerals in one country on the cereals of another. For him the science of Economy was never dismal, though perhaps tragic.

Meantime he tasted an England, which was very sweet to the children of the Squire. A born naturalist, he hunted the Herald Moth amongst the family coffins, and took the Golden Oriole's nest in an Insignis pine. He wandered Salisbury Plain with horse and field-glass, watching the Norfolk Plover and the Sand Grouse. There were Richardson Skuas within reach of the Irish property. There was a herony in their Sussex woods, and ravens built in the Park until shot by a new keeper. Sometimes Moreton used to trace the stupendous ill-luck which followed him

## MORETON FREWEN

through life to the death of the ravens. Or to the mummy of an Egyptian princess, which he and his brothers unrolled at Brickwall. It would be simpler to attribute family ill-luck to agricultural depression, but Moreton always seemed to carry a spice of Fortune's malice in his wallet. All his life he played the gifts of his character against the arrows of circumstance.

He was finely gifted with physique. He was one of the best gentlemen-riders in England. And he had a first-class mind untroubled by second thoughts. He had a lightning range over the world of theory, and a certain arrogance towards facts. His traits were the despair and the delight of his friends. He said he preferred a cottage in Sussex to a province of Utopia, but he spent a lifetime exploring that realm. His mixed philosophy was gathered partly from the green fields of the chase and partly from the greener tables of gambling. He believed that with the best friends as with the best horses, he could get anywhere. From Roulette he gleaned the deadly knowledge that numbers, if backed long enough, turn up at last. But a lifetime is sometimes shorter than an afternoon in the Casino.

He became the forlorn herald of Tariffs, Federalism, Imperial Preference, and above all of Bimetallism. In other words, he championed Silver as legal currency and the bride of gold and, since large sums of silver would require wheelbarrows to carry, he favoured paper money. In all these he was a prophet with little honour in his time or country.

## SUBLIME FAILURES

For thirty years he travelled and lobbied between England and America, where he was known as "Silvertongue". He was the Athanasius of Silver and was prepared to stand against not one world but two. At the same time he pursued his individual quest for private fortune. In spite of his own domestic difficulties he proffered the laws of finance to distant and unheeding lands. He passed so quickly from the truths of political economy to the pitfalls of fortune hunting that it was difficult to know whether he was trying to enrich himself or the whole white world. He enjoyed the life that will come to no Englishmen again. At Cambridge he ran the 'Varsity Drag in days when a Master of Hounds preceded a Master of Arts. He became President of the Athenæum, a society of young men devoted to Bacchus rather than to Pallas. His greatest feat was to win a midnight steeplechase against Lord Rossmore. He rode at Melton in splendid company: with Lord Lonsdale and Bay Middleton and Whyte Melville. Are not his rides recorded in the *Cream of Leicestershire*? Was he not the hero of the great Ranksborough run of 20th January, 1877, a hunt that even now thrills the dead page? The cover of that book still shows him riding through the railway cut on that memorable day, whence rang the tradition to "ride straight as they rode it from Ranksborough Gorse"!

He met in the field and dined with Lord Wilton, who had been born in the eighteenth century, and whose hands were still divine upon rein or organ

## MORETON FREWEN

pipe. He rode with Bay Middleton when he piloted the Empress Elizabeth, of whom he wrote lyrically in his Hunting Diary as well as a note leaving it open whether she was in love with Middleton or with his riding. He owned famous horses such as Redskin, whom Ouida fed in the park with caramels. Moreton presented Redskin to Mrs. Langtry, who rode him when accompanied by the Prince of Wales. His own attendance on that lady was cut short by the ill-fated Crown Prince Rudolph, whom he found "an inconveniently frequent visitor". When he had finished his portion of money, he found it necessary to leave the Shires for the Prairies. He preferred to be dazzled by the unspoilt nature of the Rockies than by the spoilt ladies in London whom he praised with melodious eloquence. But it was the problems of Currency which fascinated him most. All his life he flirted with big finance, and Bimetallism proved his consuming mistress.

Moreton's funds made it necessary to decide a choice rare even in the lives of the adventurous, between a Polar expedition in Gordon Bennett's yacht, the Mastership of the *Kilkennies*, and cattle-punching in Wyoming. After due espial of the land he allowed General Sheridan to persuade him to take virgin ranch in the West. He rode through Indian territory and saw God's own country as it came from the Makers. He met the terror of gunmen, Bat Masterson, in Dodge City. He watched the last herds of buffalo. He talked to Sitting Bull on the scene

## SUBLIME FAILURES

of the Custer massacre. He dined with Barnum, one of America's lost Presidents. He met old Peter Cooper, who remembered Washington's funeral, so young was the country. He became "absurdly fond of this strange people", who entertained him like an Athenian wandering in *Græcia Magna*. He found Washington a city of quagmires and shanties and Denver City a mining camp under the forest-clad mountains: a view which he never equalled during his long travelling life save in Kenya or with a passing glimpse at Norfolk Island.

When necessity drove, he was glad to return to such a country. Lever would have enjoyed his passage through Ireland, whose hunting fields had often acclaimed him. To catch the liner at Queenstown he travelled to Dublin, but missed the Sunday Mail. He chartered a special to catch Ireland's fastest train with two hours of a start. In Cork a crowd came to cheer him as he boarded the moving liner from a fast tender. Cork brought him luck all his life.

He carried good rifles and capital, for Englishmen were investing millions in cattle. With his brother Richard, he organized Johnson County, a tract hitherto on lease from God to the buffalo. On Powder River they built a wooden castle and set down to enjoy the game and fishing. Herds were bought and cowboys hired for their herding. Buffalo Bill himself came as a scout. Three ponies could be bought for a bottle of whisky in that earthly Paradise. There were antelope and mountain sheep

## MORETON FREWEN

to shoot. Every pool was rich with wild fowl and the coloured trout danced in the icy streams. On every tree was a hawk's nest, and in the distant heights above the sullen lines of retreating buffalo and Sioux hung the American eagle.

They lived like men. They swam in ice ponds and shaved with snow. An initial adventure proved nearly fatal. Setting to ride in winter from Camp Brown to Fort McKinney they were caught by snow in the Great Divide. There would they have perished, but no novelist could imagine their means of escape. The snow was flattened before them by a living snow plough of stampeding buffalo, which bobbed in and out of sight like black porpoises through a white sea. Six weeks later they staggered into Crazy Woman, and for the first and last time men had crossed the Great Divide in December. Meltonians were fit and spare in those days. On another occasion Moreton's horse collapsed, and he had to walk forty miles into Rock Creek. He started at sunrise, but during the night he was held up by fifteen miles of deep snow through which he fell every hundred steps. For two or three hours he could hardly ward off a sleep which meant death, but he reached the station at ten the next morning. Nobody believed his tale ! There were moments of civilization when he visited New York by rail from Cheyenne. On one occasion he was asked by Mrs. Langtry on tour to meet Oscar Wilde on tour, whose lecturing costume had amused the woolly West as much as the spick and span

## SUBLIME FAILURES

breeches of the Meltonians. Oscar had learnt from Dickens' *American Notes* to be disappointed with the Atlantic. Moreton gave him the famous yarn that Western audiences were requested not to shoot well-intentioned performers, which "during the next two months had climbed the steppes of Russia and even penetrated Tibet". It was at least born at that famous dinner of three.

As soon as the log castle was habitable, Moreton's friends the bucks and beaux of the hunting shires began to arrive. They shot bear and bison. Moreton and his brother shot four brace of bruin in a day. Lord Queensberry was an honoured guest, whose boxing code was a firmer link between the West and the old country than Shakespeare or the English Bible. Horace Plunkett was a neighbouring manager. Lord Lonsdale was the fairy godfather of the show, and owing to his good relations with road agents prevented the whole party being shot up. Accidents there were. Gilly Leigh fell down a precipice and one of the Roches was killed by Indians. Sir Maurice de Bunsen stalked and shot their only milch cow in mistake for a thin buffalo. Those were days when English sportsmen felt like poachers, who had broken into the Garden of Eden, despite the Archangel, whose six-shooter might point every way. Meantime real cowboys ranged after the herds, which increased, though not as much as was believed by Moreton, who once purchased the same herd twice in the same day. This oft-told story spread into legendary variants

## MORETON FREWEN

through the West. The herds were finally transferred to an English Company with a Duke for chairman. This lent confidence, though it did not improve the grazing. Squatting settlers and nibbling sheep were spoiling the ranches. The Government disputed the claims of cattlemen to lands, neither leased nor bought. Cattlemen saw their only chance was to move North before they were overrun. Moreton hoped he had twenty years, but he had only five months in which to act. He wrote in panic to London Directors who cabled to Plunkett in greater panic still. Plunkett gave his best advice, and friendship was severed. At this juncture genius rose to meet disaster. Lawrence Oliphant had once told Moreton of the beautiful land-locked harbour at the end of Lake Superior, which he had discovered in the 'sixties. Moreton planned to move his cattle there on the way to Alberta ranges in Canada or by ship to England. Cheap American store cattle might restore the fortunes of English agriculture. It was calling in the New World to redress the balances of the Old ! Meantime grass was failing, and hundreds of head were dying every night. He built sheds for a thousand on the shores of Superior, and fed them with refuse from grain elevators. He passed to tracts south of Calgary, disposing for a song the lands on which West Superior City now stands, and so missed the fortune under his feet. He fought the blizzard hoping to get the remnant of his cattle-Anabasis (for he remembered Xenophon) into England. He won over

## SUBLIME FAILURES

the Viceroy Lansdowne, and the Premier Macdonald (Sir John, a doughtier man than Ramsay). He dashed across Ocean on one of the hundred trips he made across the Atlantic during his life, and tackled the cattle embargo and the Privy Council. He invited Lord Carlingford to initiate "an era of cheap beef steaks" by a stroke of the pen, but the Cattle Acts proved obdurate. Moreton was introduced to the British Electors as the Wyoming Cattle King. With a glittering pen he pointed out the need of store cattle from America. His lean stock would fatten and leave their manure in place of "Peruvian abominations" which had to be bought. The Press grew hot with arguments. One thing was certain, "Mr. Frewen knows how to perform with figures. He tickles with microscopic fractions and anon he thunderbolts with crashing thousands." But his figures were in vain against the dread of cattle disease.

Still the cattle perished, and desperately Moreton proposed to shackle the cold and make an open-air refrigerator on Sherman, the highest point of the Pacific Railway. It would enable him to dispose of moribund beef without building an ice-plant. But the Directors were fumbling their atlases and losing hope. The cattle could only move 10 miles a day. Dividends were sinking into food-bills, and still they mingled their skeletons with those of the buffalo. The Directors invited Plunkett to take over the Company, and in June, 1885, Moreton abandoned the ranch on Powder River. His name remains

## MORETON FREWEN

attached to schools in Superior City, whose site had once been at his feet, as the name of a pioneer, though citizens were uncertain whether he came to America in the *Mayflower* or the *Great Eastern*. He eventually resigned and wrote the Directors a wonderful report, in which the feeding of 10,000 head was referred to as "temporary and judicious stall-feeding". He also based great hopes on the climatic excellencies of the winter habitat of the Sioux Indians, which became a proverb amongst cattle speculators. It was all over, for the Great Cattle Catastrophe had come. Moreton's was not the only Company to crash, and ten millions of British Capital literally went West. He found himself down by thirty thousand, and the rest of his life was a spectacular and unavailing effort to catch up.

Two comments may be recorded across the lapse of time. Horace Plunkett described "the whole story as an example of Moreton's brilliant imagination, and even prophetic vision aborted by a fatal inability to face inconvenient facts". And Lord Rosslyn, a Director, wrote at the time : "I fearlessly challenge anybody to prove that you have not always been right in your actions, your prophecies, your suggestions for escape from a most difficult crisis. Your only fault latterly has been you could not raise money fast enough."

This particular fault seemed to remain with him through life. Funds never caught pace with his quickness in turning from one scheme to another.

## SUBLIME FAILURES

For a time Moreton believed that Britannia, like Europa, could be carried on the back of a steer. His ranching failure made him an expert in all matters of hoof and horn. His writings converted Professor Foxwell to the admission of store-cattle and Colonial Preference. A splendid and informing correspondence grew between him and the Cambridge Professor, and they passed together into the morasses of the Bimetallic Theorem. But Wyoming was left a magnificent memory. At least he had seen the West when it was wild with pioneers and woolly with bison. He had met surviving Argonauts, who had hunted the Golden Fleece in California and hewn the Pacific States out of the redwood forests. He had honeymooned in Wyoming before it was a State, and sent his wife back to civilization in the famous Deadwood Coach, which figured in all Buffalo Bill's Shows. Those far-away conditions were embalmed in Owen Wister's *Virginian*, where Moreton appeared shadowy-wise as "the boss of the seventy-six outfit". Wister's account of the hanging of what the Elizabethans called "a Prigger of Prancers" or a horse thief, wrung a cord in Moreton, for he had been Coroner on such an occasion. There is a tale of him lying in a chair as late as 1919, and hearing a young man boast returns from ranching in Wyoming. A sepulchral voice asked his ranch, and was told Johnson County. "I organized Johnson County in '76, and dropped thirty-thousand before the 'eighties," continued the voice.

## MORETON FREWEN

Moreton returned a wiser but never a sadder man. Exuberant health and optimism made him an Atlas upholding a world full of schemes. His life friend, Albert Grey, proposed him as a Liberal, and the farmer's friend. John Morley, was captivated by his Cattle article. Grey described him "as Hartingtonian, able, thrusting, and formidable candidate, although a damned carpet-bagger". A Liberal caucus was illiberal enough to reject him as a candidate, though with his usual prophetic power he had introduced them to Home Rule a few days before Gladstone's conversion. The cause of agriculture made him a champion of Silver, and henceforth he lived in the Bimetallic twilight. He was the first exponent of paper money, and only opposed Goschen's scheme for issuing small notes against Silver, because it did not go far enough. In days to come he proposed paying Old Age Pensions with such notes.

Even here his perverse luck followed him. When Goschen succeeded Randolph Churchill at the Exchequer, Moreton might have become his private secretary and entered Politics. This he had to decline, as Randolph was his brother-in-law. However, Randolph, who had become of world interest, furnished him with useful letters on his next adventure, which was in the East.

A sporting trip in India made Moreton aware of the impure state of the finances of Hyderabad. The Nizam had exiled the beneficent Salar Jung in favour

of Abdul Huq, whose financial villanies beggared anything in the Arabian Nights. Armed with powerful support from Randolph, Moreton proceeded to make exposure. He discovered that Abdul with two men of straw from London City was unloading concessions on the public to bring themselves £1,100,000: "Every penny of which might have come into the coffers of the State. Are not such things worthy, even unworthy, the days of Warren Hastings?" Abdul returned from England with a Cabinet scheme and himself as centrepiece, which he pretended was in Goschen's handwriting. Unfortunately, Moreton happened to know "Goschen, Abdul's Confederate", and proceeded to prick the intrigue. At Randolph's advice, Salar Jung accepted Moreton as his adviser, and they met at Cairo, where the disgraced Minister was so charmed that he proposed a jaunt in the Balkans. Moreton was anxious to study the possibilities of Federalism, his life-solution for all difficulties from Dublin to Calcutta. Quickly he converted Salar Jung to "an open mind whether all India might in the fullness of time drape her vast docile and elephantine bulk with these same federal trappings but subject to a white mahout". The tour was a great success, though at Constantinople Salar Jung was seized with a desire for a Turkish wife, and Moreton spent some unusual hours bargaining in a harem. The tour was continued to Vienna, Berlin, Paris, and Goodwood, where Lavington was taken for the Races. The Bimetallist Duke of

Marlborough brought his coach and Count Kinsky, winner of the Grand National, his Hungarian band that Salar Jung might be introduced to English life. In serious moments Moreton wrote an article which Salar Jung signed (*Nineteenth Century*, October, 1887), suggesting federation between the Austrian and Ottoman States against Russia. This oddly drew a public letter from Gladstone condemning Turkey in Europe, but mentioning "the beneficial progress of Islam in Africa".

When the party set out for India, the Nizam cabled to Brindisi forbidding return, and again to Suez doubling Salar Jung's leave. Staff and suite expected execution on arrival, but Moreton's optimism prevented them jumping into the Red Sea. From Bombay Moreton invoked an old sporting friend, Lord William Beresford, secretary to the Viceroy, and the path was smoothed. The Nizam received the party at a race meeting. Moreton was presented as the financial saviour of Hyderabad, and adopted a position shrouded with rumour. His prestige was considerable, and he was treated to ceremonial elephant rides. He set about unravelling frauds and incidentally proposed an irrigation scheme touching fifteen million acres. Abdul Huq became his watchful enemy, but the Nizam promised Moreton a year's leakage from the Treasury if he could locate it. Finding the atmosphere of intrigue fantastic, he tried to cut the Gordian knot by leading a deputation to England. His position was delicate, for while he was

## SUBLIME FAILURES

undermining the schemes of others he was advancing some of his own. In the end he forced a Committee of Inquiry and won the Nizam's fee. Abdul was given six months leave. Unfortunately, Salar Jung, 24 years of age, and of the same stone weight, died in the following year or Moreton might have returned to irrigate dominions of the Nizam as his life's work. Meantime he had made a real discovery, the poems of Kipling in the *Pioneer*, which he forwarded to England to learn that they were not up to the standard of the *Daily Telegraph*! He introduced Kipling's works to Yates of the *World*, who caused a literary sensation by publishing "Danny Deever". Moreton persuaded Kipling to sail with his manuscripts to England: whither he came, the public saw and the critics were conquered. In later years their friendship was renewed in Sussex, and Moreton kept fragments of correspondence. When he captured a white seal off the Irish coast, he sent the skin to Kipling who answered (28th March, 1912) :—

"Just back to find Kotick the White Seal in all his glory! I never saw such a pelt! Didn't believe they were possible. He shines like silver and spun glass. His proper destination, of course, ought to be an altar cloth or something of that nature, for he is too lovely to be used either as a rug or a wrap."

Hyderabad was a glittering episode. Moreton said he lived amongst Ali Baba and his friends, and was relieved to return to Occidental finance. He refused a tiara of brilliants for his wife, but she was allowed

## MORETON FREWEN

to present some ladies of Hyderabad at Court. Queen Victoria mistaking her for at least a Vice-Reine, kissed her and for the first time in a Drawing-Room was kissed back on the spot ! The Prince of Wales was so hugely amused by the mistake that almost he required assistance.

Moreton's next venture was the Crawford Gold Crusher. The Currency question had shown him there was not enough gold in the world. He proposed to increase it by extracting the gold from all the mine-heaps of the world. It was a stroke worthy of Jules Verne turned Bimetallist. For months the machine worked admirably in model on Moreton's dining table. Society was interested and friends risked money. The Prince was brought to see what he called a chocolate mill. Albert Grey brought Beit and Werner, who supplied ore, and sufficient gold was milled to provide one of the Directors with a wedding ring. Marlborough referred the machine to Edison, who favoured the chlorine over the grinding process. But Moreton continued his experiment and lured a large group by powers of hypnotic salesmanship. It was a question whether the Crusher went to India or Africa or Australia first. The mining world rang with judicious rumour. Randolph came to see a private working of the model, and the inventor, anxious to dispel his scepticism, treated him to a prelude on the violin. It was time for Moreton to hurry inventor and invention to Australia, where he acquired a share of Broken Hill Mine through Lord

## SUBLIME FAILURES

Kintore, the Governor. But neither inventor nor invention could be reduced to working order. Instead of crushing the ore, the ore crushed the Crusher. Once again Moreton missed a fortune in a by-product of a scheme. He had only to keep his share of Broken Hill, worth £3,000 a year, but he sold and hastened on his way.

Plan followed plan. He plotted to bring Siberian timber to England by a North-West passage which was only open for three weeks in the year. He proposed collecting bats' guano from caves in Texas and Mexico, where it had accumulated since the days of Montezuma. Samples killed the gardenias of his friends. He had an option on trams in Denver, which he let slip on a hunting expedition. In 1892 he was near great possibilities. Senator Brice asked him to find a European house to handle Pacific Railroad Stock. He brought it to Sir Ernest Cassel, who said he had had shocking experience of American railways. "I suppose a little later Harriman got hold of it. If Cassel had taken it up, he would have made Western history at these prices."

He dallied longest on British Electrozones, a harsh-smelling disinfectant the result of electrical currents playing on sea-water. Electrozones were boomed as a bath-dressing for the exquisite, and as a sauce for the gourmet who enjoyed meat high. It appeared on distinguished toilet tables and was sometimes produced at dinner parties by Moreton as a corrective to stale fish. It was used successfully on horses in

## MORETON FREWEN

the Matabele War. Moreton claimed that it made a substitute for dentists. But the chemists would not sell the stuff and he was compelled to relinquish what has since achieved success as the Deodorant of the Age. At least it brought him the friendship of Rhodes, who ordered fifty dozen, but probably because he enjoyed Moreton's wonderful letters.

Later Moreton was spell-bound by the Ashcroft patents called Sulphides for separating tin from zinc, which Fletcher Moulton considered the most valuable ever submitted to him. In 1894 Moreton took it to Australia, and launched the patents with a million of capital. It seemed clear that a fortune awaited the treatment of enormous deposits of silver zinc in America. An expert was sent to bond the waste ores before their owners had word of the magical processes. Unfortunately, Moreton's option in America proved to be not "entirely correct in its legal form". His expert was repudiated and his American Company thrown overboard. He attributed his disappointments to "the financial trouble caused by the Venezuela Message and the raid on Johannesburg". President Cleveland and Dr. Jameson had combined to spoil his Sulphides. He estimated he had spent £4,000 and two years of work and decided to take legal action. Grey dissuaded him on the ground that it was better to settle than fight.

During these years his wife entertained not without brilliance. At his house King Milan of Servia met Paderewski, sportsmen met Bimetallists, and musicians

met both. Sir Arthur Sullivan of Gilbertian fame once scribbled a note while arranging a dinner for the Duke of York : "I want another lady without a man badly. Will you come to my rescue and I will give Moreton any satisfaction he desires afterwards, either pistols, swords, or Utah shares !" Moreton was a great talker between schemes. He had discovered that the art of conversation is the art of sowing the Chestnuts of one country in another. When money reached him, he was over-generous. But he lay down that his family must share his downs in return for the uplands to which he promised one day to lead them. Valuable servants he thought were easiest retained by omitting wages, in which case they became part of the family. He had an amazing facility for staking the coming years to serve the moment's needs.

Bimetallism was the passion of his life, and all else was secondary. It used to be said that Bimetallism was only understood by three persons : Giffen, Balfour, and Moreton, who had all come to different conclusions. In the hands of staticians Bimetallism becomes a fearful Hydra but nothing can be simpler. Under the Gold Standard silver is a commodity. Gold buys, but silver is bought. When gold is scarce or hoarded or restricted, there is financial panic or depression. Gold is like the blood of the body commercial. When it grows thin, there is anæmia and, where it is piled, there is a clot. A silver currency offers a form of blood transfusion.

## MORETON FREWEN

Bimetallists ask that the silver should be coined and crowned as a queen beside the gilt despot. Incidentally the East has used silver for a thousand years, while the West had only adopted the gold standard during a hundred years. Government cannot create a profuse harvest but it can create currency. Moreton arguing on these lines became an argentomaniac. He campaigned against the Gold Standard when it was enshrined beside Magna Charta, and regarded by England as a virtuous woman regards her marriage lines. He pleaded for paper money based on both a gold and silver reserve. And he foretold that the Gold Standard would fall like Dagon before the Ark. Only dark disaster could make his prophecies valid. He lived to see the paper note take the place of the sovereign during the War: and when England dropped the Gold Standard, how many Bimetallists said to themselves: "This is Moreton's day, were he alive to see it!"

The Bimetallists in the 'eighties were an ardent and convincing team. Their names and their crusade lie in Moreton's immense and unedited papers. Had it not been for the gold discovered in South Africa, the Bimetal campaign might have succeeded. But gold received a new lease of life. There was Lord Aldenham, banker and bibliophile, for none of them were single-track minds. There was Lord Desborough, who swam Niagara and the rapids of Currency no less. There was Sir William Houldsworth, iron magnate and organist, in Harry Chaplin's

## SUBLIME FAILURES

opinion possessor of the best champagne in London. There was Harry Chaplin, a Derby winner, who had literally taken to heart Gladstone's saying that Bimetallism was Protection disguised. There was Dana Horton, who made fortunes to further the sacred cause, author of *The Silver Pound*. Obtaining leave to add a slight Appendix to the American Currency Report of '78, he slipped in 643 pages ! There was Cernuschi, a Garibaldian who served Free Italy and Free Silver with equal devotion. There were Governors of the Bank of England like Lidderdale who saved the City after the Baring smash. But he never dared to flaunt his Bimetallism for fear the Gold-bugs should discredit the paper of his Bank. There was Marlborough, who invited Moreton to stand for Woodstock, and whose brilliant letters seem to come nearest to dissecting the currency question. But as he had "some disregard of ethical substrata" he had once to dine with Moreton under the name of Mr. Churchill for fear of frightening a pious Bimetallist from the cause.

Moreton began his unceasing campaign in the Press until all interest in the question was absorbed by the Irish and Tariff controversies and till his only supporter was Lord Desborough, who heroically resigned his seat when the Indian Mints were closed to Silver. *Spectator* and *Telegraph* admitted him with perennial patience. At one time he unloaded his gospel on Stead, but not always, for Stead wrote : "I defy the Archangel Gabriel himself

## MORETON FREWEN

to do a smart Dialogue upon Bimetallism.” At one time Moreton was hunting for three-quarters of a million to enable Stead to edit the final newspaper of the world. Moreton introduced Stead to Lady Warwick in order to moderate his attacks on the Prince.

The Bimetallists thought thus. Both France and Germany debased silver for the worst of reasons, Germany to get even with the Latin Union, which was helping France pay her debt, and France to spite Germany. As Lord Aldenham said, “this they did to their own harm and that of every country.” The Bimetallists wished silver to be ratioed to gold, the debased metal made honest and taken unashamedly to the mint. But the Gold-bugs kept silver like a prostitute. Moreton made the finest speech in the Deputation which faced Salisbury and Goschen in 1889. As Del Mar, the historian of the precious metals, wrote : “When the silver agitation gets to the door of poverty and distress, Salisbury’s reply to you will be remembered and when the Gold-bug friends of Goschen are hooted in the street by the people, his reply to you will be recalled.”

A fresh blow fell in 1893, when the Indian Mints were closed to Silver. Moreton believed this was unjust to a people, who had used silver for a thousand years, and he traced both famine and unrest to interference with the currency. It was a fracture between the silver-using millions of the East and the gold-financed West. Great was the correspondence to be

## SUBLIME FAILURES

waged henceforth with Indian Viceroys and Secretaries. It lies thick in the Frewen Archives. But in 1897 there came a chance of national interest.

Moreton had been working behind the scene in America. At one time he knew personally every Senator in Washington. In 1894 he drafted a cable in favour of Silver to the Lord Mayor of London, which was signed by fourteen Senators. The Democratic Party declared for Free Silver, and Senator Lorimer cabled to England for money and men. Moreton responded if not in purse in person, and became a devoted henchman of Bryan, who proposed to release mankind from her cross of gold. It is history how the Gold-bugs were strong enough to keep him and his white money from the White House. But a Commission from America, abetted by Moreton, visited England in the hope of restoring the rupee and reopening Indian Mints. They received a dull check from the Indian Government, and Moreton apologized thus to Senator Teller: "The reply of Calcutta may well amaze you. The signatories:—

Lord Elgin, his mind a blank page on Exchange.  
Sir George White, a gallant general.

Sir James Westland, a fount of valuable misinformation.

The entire reply is based upon a laughable and yet tragic misconception that India had reached the further shore."

Kipling used to call Moreton's letters Apocalyptic.

But the important thing was that this deputation discovered that Mr. Balfour was "an earnest Bimetallist". This was unexpected caviare, which it was necessary to bring before the general. Moreton tracking Balfour was like a hare pursuing hare over the ice. Balfour could not support Bryan from Downing Street, but he wrote to Moreton: "Why do not the U.S., if they think, as they do quite rightly in my opinion, that Bimetallism is for their advantage, force Bimetallism on the world whether England likes it or not?" Balfour promised to write his full opinion to Senator Hoar for use in the States. Moreton saw it, and described it as admirable. Unfortunately, Balfour's colleagues, Salisbury, Hicks-Beach, and George Hamilton, were shown the letter, and turned it down, men whose combined brain-power must have been to Balfour's in the ratio of silver to gold, sixteen and a half to one. Balfour's letter, published in 1931, raised uneasy regrets. What might have been the precise results of a Bimetallic Union between England and the States? The outbreak of War would have found them united in an aspect of that Finance, which brought in America almost too late. And the payment of England's staggering debt might have been facilitated by Silver to this day.

But Balfour, though a potent thinker, was not of crusading metal, and Moreton, after eyeing his tantalizing declaration for Silver passed into the wilderness. But the wide world is a good wilderness. He followed Exchanges round the world. "If I am

## SUBLIME FAILURES

at Washington I am there for no other conscious purpose. If I turn up in Calcutta, in Hyderabad, or Lahore, or later in Sydney or Ottawa or distant Auckland, it is to learn the currency needs of those far-flung communities." He described his beat accurately and many parts of the world regarded him as the leading or solitary champion left of Silver. Balfour wrote to him that a victory for Bryan would be disquieting, though "I by no means think that the Bimetallic movement is a matter of abstract speculation or that it ought to be regarded as dead and buried". Moreton saw the Republican Senators, who seceded to Silver, dead and buried and every business they had depending on banking support destroyed. The Banks could not hurt him, for his banking account was an elusive target. When the voices for Silver died down in America, Moreton returned again and again to the charge. The Silver States in the West hailed him as a better friend than nine-tenths of their Congress. He had the entry of Washington and addressed the Senate during a momentous Debate. Senators Lodge and Jones became his close friends, and another dear friend, Tom Reed, had his chance wrecked for the Presidency by a friendly cable from Moreton to London hailing him as a convert to Free Silver !

The years passed, and when he found a fellow-cowboy at the White House in Roosevelt, he endeavoured to persuade him to adopt the Goschen plan. He believed it was then acceptable to the

## MORETON FREWEN

English Treasury and to "Buccaneer" Morgan. And there was a suggestion that a triple understanding between America, Germany, and England could be built upon it. It was the thin edge of the silver wedge. But though Bimetallic alliances between States faded in his hand, Moreton set out to advance Anglo-American feelings with a knowledge and an influence which was rare in an Englishman. A dinner given by him to Senator Hoar led to the return of the Log of the *Mayflower* to Boston by the Bishop of London. As Hoar said, "it did more to cement the bonds of friendship than forty Canal Treaties." Penny Postage between the two Continents was entirely due to Moreton's persistent lobbying on both sides of the Atlantic. He induced the American Postmaster-General Meyer to write that he was favourably inclined. He brought Meyer to the Commons and flung him and Henniker Heaton together, who always gave Moreton the credit and wrote: "When the story of how we won Anglo-American Penny Postage is told, I shall mention the name of Moreton Frewen. I know the strenuous efforts he made to get us to meet by taking Meyer to the House of Commons. Then I remember how the said Moreton Frewen got me to write to the same Meyer, and after many months I received the great message of Peace and Goodwill dated 17th July, 1907." It took Henniker Heaton another year to convert Buxton, the British Postmaster, but the achievement was Moreton's. This was only one of his Washington

## SUBLIME FAILURES

activities. When Ambassador Pauncefote was in trouble, Moreton proved a staunch free-lance, and when he died, he crossed over to prick the intrigue set going to prevent Michael Herbert succeeding him. The new Ambassador could only write : " You have been of immense service to me, and I shall never forget it. In future you will have to look upon the Embassy as your only Hotel."

If only Moreton could have let the Silver question rest, he was promised of material friendships, interests, and position. It definitely excluded him from the House of Commons. All monomania is a bore, and England wallowing in a gold prosperity would not hear him for a moment, though he developed a wild championship for Tariff Reform, which should have made him an admirable member for the family Borough of Rye. The dying Giffen had confided in a letter : " Your Bimetallic Union is a counsel of perfection. The best you will ever achieve will be to get the Indian mints reopened to silver." To the East he turned, though neither Parliament nor Press would allow much light to be thrown on the collapse of Silver, which he insisted had brought famine and unrest in India. He located a great menace in China, and provided economists with the famous epigram that the white man with yellow money could never beat the yellow man on white money in the long run. While the East would be able to sell in the West too easily, the West would not be able to market in the East, as long as Silver was not money. He cultivated

## MORETON FREWEN

the suave representative of celestial diplomacy in London, Tong Shoa Yi, and unwound his wisdom to worry the Indian Secretary, Lord Morley. He found that the Chinese preferred the fluctuations in China to the artificial exchange fixed in India. In his suppressed letter, Balfour described the absurd position in India :—

“ The Indian Standard of value is neither free gold nor gold and silver linked together by a bimetallic law. It is silver artificially appreciated by Mint conditions so that the coined rupee has a value in excess of the silver which it contains.”

Moreton’s Open Sesame for trade with the East was simple indeed. For a thousand years the East used Silver for currency and hoarding. Why not coin silver for the East pending the fall of the Gold Standard ? But his critics in the Treasury and at the India Office no more believed that it could fall than the Philistines thought possible the prostration of Dagon.

Moreton made two more bids for private fortune, one in Africa and the other in remote Canada. In 1904 he plunged with Lord Warwick into unknown Kenya as missionaries of Empire. They took a Canadian lumberman to study the forests. Word came from the Dark Continent that Moreton had shot at a white rhino, but it turned out to be a brute which had wallowed in light clay. Later came rumour of forests magnificent. A cable survives describing “ 5,000 million feet pine and red cedar. Total profit

## SUBLIME FAILURES

quarter of a million. Fifty years to exhaust forest.” Unfortunately Moreton had exhausted friends and capital by now, and the Government would only offer a concession in return for a railway. Business on these lines was impossible. But Moreton, who could boom like a bittern, sang the pioneer praises of Kenya, the unique region where the white child and the banana flourish together. As a rule bananas signal fatality to the Caucasian babe and conversely where white children flourish, we have no bananas. Was Moreton in advance even of a famous world ditty? Moreton’s article on “The Dominion of Palm and Pine” (*Monthly Review*, June, 1906) may be regarded as the charter of the Kenya boom. He could touch the scenery with the brush of a Japanese artist, describing “Kilimanjaro with its scarp of vivid tropical green and its huge symetrical snow cone opalescent in the setting sun”: and yet make such a practical suggestion as the strategical quartering of the Indian Army at healthy Nairobi so as to be within equal striking distance of Calcutta, Cairo, and Constantinople! And he passed on leaving Frewen Forest in its aboriginal beauty to this day. Like many of his ventures, it left him in financial difficulty. He had a short and sometimes easy way with creditors. He carried them with his debit into his next scheme and repaid losses in the past by fairer hopes ahead. He treated solicitors and bailiffs as gadflies stinging the ox that dragged the Empire plough. Lord Grey said of them both:—“We are like soldier-ants, and

ought to be regularly fed at intervals by helot ants.” His position was often an ironical one. While regarded abroad as a very prop of Empire, he was often without visible means of support. But there was an unconquerable element in him which kept him buoyant. He was God’s own tonic in a depression. Good times spelt practical prosperity and bad times only proved his theories right! He could swim in a millpond or Niagara. It was incredible what harassment he could bear on his broad shoulders. He avoided bankruptcy by an agility that exceeds praise. He gave the impression of a hare pursued through the years by weasels and slipping them in the end. No man had such friends. Whatever he undertook they underwrote. They seldom resisted his eloquence, once he had struck a short cut or long odds in the world of discovery. Companions of an hour were swept into Companies, which might prove illusory for a lifetime. He said being thought rich was the next best thing to being rich. He was compared to Leigh Hunt, who combined “hopeless inexactness with eloquent idealism”. But he was more than a “Harold Skimpole”. He combined elements of Mr. Micawber, Sir Walter Raleigh, and Buffalo Bill. *The Times* described him once as “a thwarted Elizabethan”. He worked like a typist; he lived like a dreamer; he travelled like a King. He was born to pass schemes to his contemporaries and ideas to the future. “He left babies on other people’s doorsteps” said Dr. Jameson. He became the symbol of devastating bad luck,

## SUBLIME FAILURES

and his name was profanely rendered "Mortal Ruin", but as Mr. Garvin summarized : " You have had all the ideas of your time and your only trouble has been to have always been in advance of it." He had touched the world at too many points. He had ranched the virgin prairie, piped oil in Mexico, electrified sea-water into an Elixir of Life, reformed the finances of Hyderabad, brought red Sussex Cattle into Canada, and after making a second home in Ireland introduced Rainbow Trout to the land of the rainbow. Party was always subordinate to his message, and after hovering as a Liberal, and campaigning as an Imperialist, he found his Parliamentary seat late in life as a Home Ruler from Cork. By the Union, he used to say, two Parliaments were united and two peoples divided.

Ireland returned into his life : "moral but hopelessly unethical" he used to describe her. He and Bay Middleton had been of those Englishmen, who had essayed to show the Irish how to ride. They were likened by Celtic admirers to "tigers astride of antelopes" when they took the field with the Kilkenny or the Ward Union. When his brother Richard was drowned at sea, the Innishannon property fell to Moreton. He had once sold his reversion for a song, but his mother-in-law had bought it and left it to his wife. So luck was good in Cork, where he settled and built a hatchery for fish. In quick succession he introduced Rainbow Trout, Virginian Quail, and Federal Home Rule to the wistful gentry

## MORETON FREWEN

of Cork. Even Free Silver found mention between free drinks in the County Club. He installed a South African keeper to breed Irish Salmonidæ. In spite of poachers and herons his life became a dream on the Bandon River. He experimented with peat forgetful of all the inventors, who have been absorbed in the bogs. He proposed to extract horse-power in its vegetable form. Franklin had drawn electricity from the clouds, let a Frewen unravel it from the turf. But herons were voracious and the Rainbow Trout went unaccountably blind and disappeared. Miscreants destroyed his hatchery. The local hawks swooped on his quails. But happiness was his with the rod. With Lords Warwick and Dudley he fashioned a fishing syndicate at Inver in Galway, a fairy island where sea met river and lough and where golden pheasants pastured amid hydrangeas. It was the best trout-fishing in Ireland, and such was the meeting of waters fresh and salt that once a salmon, being played by rod, was attacked by a shark. Ireland is the paradise of sportsmen and the hell of politicians. In an unhappy hour Moreton was drawn into the fatal eddies and announced that he was a Home Ruler, but on his own principles.

His first gesture was a speech, with Lord Bandon in the chair, on the over-taxation of Ireland. He proposed to nationalize the Irish Railways with the money paid to England in spirit duties. Morley was interested, but thought that the drain from Ireland came in rent not taxes. He requested Moreton to visit Dillon,

## SUBLIME FAILURES

who told him politely that he was not wanted in the Irish Party. Redmond was willing to take him, if a constituency would return him, but warned him that he was a Saxon. Indignantly Moreton retorted that he had an Irish mother, and nothing more was said. It was the redoubtable Tim Healy who brought Moreton into Irish politics. From 1902 dated a friendship between this brilliant and unequal pair, conducted in bouts of mordant scintillating letters. Their search for an Irish solution might have inspired a caricature of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza amid the constituencies of Cork. Moreton was one of those idealists, who discover too late that Ireland herself is a grim realist. And Tim was her grim child. He had no illusions and, though they suffered together in the coming years of agony, he could pity the enthusiastic squire from Sussex swaying in the Irish storms. Tim drew him into the camp of William O'Brien, who offered the olive branch to landlords. His letters became melodious and epigrammatic, as wonderful a packet as Moreton's own magnetic script ever attracted into his letter files. Ten years of comment and intrigue on Irish affairs lies in the volume of sheets they wrote each other. Every page of Tim's was written with diamonds upon molten glass. He thought Moreton's two heroes rather alike, O'Brien and Chamberlain: "One blathering about the Empire we received from our fathers, and the other bleating about the Elysium we are to hand down to our children."

## MORETON FREWEN

As for the Irish “leave us our dreams, our pride of past, our hope of future undimmed and I fear you may steal the present from the belt.”

They united affection for George Wyndham. “He was most scurvily treated and that is why I have come to forgive O’Brien because he behaved honourably to him.” Upon this, Moreton induced Tim to jump the fences of Phoenix Park one night and pay a surreptitious visit to the Chief Secretary. As Moreton softened towards the Pope, Tim looked into the merits of the Silver question, and told a jeering House that the Old Age Pensions only cost the Government their weight in five shillings of silver”. Of the English, Tim ventured an odd comment : “The English have had great luck in temporal affairs because in the main their central sentiment is God-fearing.” Moreton entertained the Catholic to fish and gave him Himalayan Spikenard. His gifts were always exotic. But in the storing and eating of fish he saw a wonderful key to reaping the Silver of the sea.

Moreton made an odd-fashioned Nationalist, for he was as devoted to the House of Lords in London as to an Irish Commons in Dublin. He warned Redmond : “You are no Machiavelli to compass England’s disaster by such means. The idea that we will sacrifice a Chamber of Notables at the bidding of a Chamber of Nobodies!” When Asquith proposed to add enough Peers to pass the Parliament Bill, Moreton trumpeted, “who are the five hundred whose honours are to be rooted in such dishonour ?

## SUBLIME FAILURES

It will be for posterity a new Battle Abbey roll." He called on the Dukes to ride in chain mail through London with pennons flying to save their discredited order. He went to New York to collect funds for the Cork Free Press and at the General Election of December, 1910, through personal pressure he was returned for East Cork. "We will elect your old hat," shouted a voice when the indomitable O'Brien proposed his queer follower. To the amusement of some, the wrath of more, and the delight of most, Moreton reached the House at last. Leo Maxse wrote in transports : "This is truly magnificent : the most piquant episode of the election. May I be there to hear you Federalize." It was typical of Moreton that the first assemblage he addressed after election to Westminster was Washington. No member was ever in a stranger position : a Two-Chamber-Imperialist Federal Bimetallic Home Ruler! His time in the House was short, for he felt like one of his trout out of water. He called for a Second Chamber "to hold down this Westminster Were-wolf". He made a Federal Home Rule speech, and after asking a few questions about India, unfurled the flag of Silver. Then he resigned his seat in favour of Tim Healy, who had lost in Louth, but he continued his intrigues to further an Irish solution. Wide and optimistic were his words, assays, and thrusts. "Balfour will join Asquith if Redmond gives trouble" he informed Tim. He had no aptitude for wary walking. He attacked the Redmondite and

## MORETON FREWEN

furnished himself with a certificate from Bourke Cockran, a personal friend, but the leading Redmondite in America. He spread a report that Carson, with whom he was related, would take Home Rule from the O'Brienite party. Carson wrote sternly when Walter Long showed him a letter of Healy passed on by Moreton in that sense. The spicier Healy's letters, the more urgently Moreton distributed them amongst the Tory leaders. The Ulster members, said Tim in one of a hundred epigrams : "would rather go wrong and lead others wrong than risk the taunt of having sold the pass." How true ! and truer still the prophecy : "the Strikers will raise issues before long far transcending the alleged peril of Home Rule".

Meantime Moreton worked to split the Irish Party. His glittering pen quested everywhere. Not only did he run with the hare and hunt with the hounds, but occasionally he climbed behind the huntsman and blew a dubious blast from a twisted horn. He intrigued with Carson. He financed William O'Brien. He fought and finessed with Redmond. He was for ever trying to get Dillon thrust to the wolves. He inspired Dunraven. He supplied Tim with powder and shot. He corresponded with all the Imperialists, who could be induced to let a single Federal bee buzz in their bonnets. Even the Diehard Tories he enticed, saying : "I am more likely to serve England as a Home Ruler than if I threw up the sponge." His Machiavellian plan was to coax the men of Ulster down the path of Separation and, having disarmed

## SUBLIME FAILURES

them, leave them to their own reflections on that giddy steep. He claimed that Carson told him that Ireland could be united by a Federal State alone. And to O'Brien he signalled : "you must build a bridge even of sighs to the Tories." Without coming into the open Moreton continued to set underground wires which tripped up his friends as often as his critics. Under cloak of a League of Federals he collected thousands of dollars from the Harrimans, Ryans, Goulds, and Manns in America to keep the Free Press floating. So successful was he at milking millionaires that he wrote : "I will draft an Encyclical." But the beneficiary rag for which he collected ten thousand pounds proved ungrateful and only "discovered weak apologies for O'Brien having put me in Parliament". He had to turn to the Unionist Press to publish his Federal manifesto. The Free Press published it "between Erse hieroglyphics and Police Cases !" He played his lone hand hopeful that one side or other would snatch Federalism as a lifebuoy. Lord Grey returned from Canada to bless Federalism in the Lords. Moreton buzzed between Chamberlain, Lansdowne, and O'Brien. Even Dr. Jameson was drawn into his gossamer. Grey and Dunraven were harnessed like plunging steeds to poor O'Brien's coach, which showed signs of falling to pieces like the famous one-horse shay. Arms and armies were being collected in Ireland. Moreton suddenly signed the Ulster Covenant in the hope he could turn Carson into a

## MORETON FREWEN

Federal Home Ruler yet! He hailed Redmond as a Federal Unionist and made a last-minute appeal to Lansdowne to "summon a Philadelphia Convention". From Carson he received an arrow out of the last ditch: "I am afraid I cannot see two sides to the question. I think the House of Lords might be amalgamated with the Paddington Parliament!" Ten days later England was at war with Germany. Moreton was not unready. Two years previously Kipling had written him: "Sometimes I think that that shindy will be on us before the Home Rule row as it was in the time of James II. I wonder whether the landing will be unopposed."

The Irish question simmered through the War, and Moreton, amid a score of schemes: (libraries for the sailors, pooling the Silver of four nations to stop the gold drain to the East, captured Zeppelins for Empire mails, State storages of fish on the British coast, the profits of which would pay the Naval Estimates) dipped finger in the simmering. He was still angling for Carson, whom he caught in a train, and sent pleasant words therefrom to Tim and O'Brien, but he reproached the Irish as Herbert Spencer reproached women as "wanting in the abstract sentiment of Justice unswayed by sympathy". Walter Long, a dear old friend, was at the Colonial Office, and Moreton was bringing pressure on the Diehards. He interviewed on the side of wisdom Lord Shaughnessy and Viceroy Wimborne. He brought Lord MacDonnell and Dr. Jameson together.

## SUBLIME FAILURES

“ Each likes the other, but the African has the better grip.” And through rising and revolt and repression Tim’s letters provided wise and scintillating comment. Their piled correspondence only tells a tithe of the activities of the twain. Peace came, and Ireland was embroiled yet more bitterly. For Moreton very bitter Sinn Fein days were at hand when his agent and his fish-keeper were shot. He prepared to publish a cry of disillusion and recantation in America. Tim tried to dissuade him : “ Royalty or Imperialism can never afford to descend to the shambles. The statesman and the Rapparee are not twain or easy in double harness. I try to make allowances for a blinkered Cabinet, but when they flouted our preachments for forty years, why set sighs to music.” Moreton’s sighs appeared in the *Telegraph*, the sincerest and fiercest letter of his life. Before the month was out his Innishannon home ascended in flames. When Irish peace came, Tim was installed in the Viceregal. Moreton’s persistent lobbying had made him appear the only possible ruler for the Free State in English eyes.

For the time Ireland was destined to enjoy Sabbaths. Fantastic the remedy would have seemed in the past : Tim in royal plumes! but neither Redmond nor Parnell stirred in the mental quicklime of their graves. Dillon was left to die like a mewed eagle, and Carson was flown, unlucky enough to miss the martyrdom which befell another. All Moreton’s abettors were scattered. Dunraven built himself a yacht and went fishing upon the high seas. O’Brien left a burnt

## MORETON FREWEN

Mallow for the West. Moreton retired to his Sussex home at Brede. To Ireland he returned never. He had drawn that quota of sport and friends and dreams, which that fascinating land will always give to the generous and the reckless, even when she cannot take them to heart. He planted a trunkful of Connemara heather in the Weald and thenceforth forgot. Because his hopes had been high, he gave up Ireland as hopeless.

One scheme was left to Moreton during his last days. For ten years he had been struggling with the development of Prince Rupert, a Pacific Port at the terminus of the railway. It involved him in large loans, distant travel, formidable lawsuits, in close scrapping with the Jade called Fortune, and gradually in loss, disappointment, physical collapse, and death. In 1906 he was travelling with Hays, the tough and grasping President of the Grand Trunk. Hays offered him a thousand acres, where his line struck Ocean, if he would act as canvasser in the Empire. Moreton was to provide capitalists and Hays the land. The offer was confirmed before witnesses but never written down. Moreton brought in Lord D'Abernon and Hays-Hammond, and set out to the ultimate West. Thanks to his booming powers the acres rose rapidly in value. Lots began to sell for a thousand pounds apiece, and Hays began to compromise. Moreton fell back on the law: and Hays, who would only offer outside lands, was able to win on a narrow legal point. Lord Grey as Governor-General and

## SUBLIME FAILURES

his dearest oldest friend, sent Moreton private word through the Premier from the Judge "that your case has been that of a gentleman against a rascal, that you had been justified in your interpretation of Hays' promises which were binding upon a man of honour". Moreton raised a loan to appeal to the Privy Council. He made his unrealized promises into a Syndicate and issued maps with a dream panorama of Rupert lit by his rosy hopes. Prince Rupert the short cut to China and Japan ! the trade of Alaska ! the wheat of Alberta ! the greatest fish industry in the World ! The very railway gradients conspired to make it a success.

Between Moreton and Hays it was a fight to the death. He intrigued to put him out of his chairmanship and Hays, snuffing powerful leverage, offered him a chance to liquidate the speculation. Moreton refused, and they set to wear each other out. Hays had lawyers and the Grand Trunk behind him, Moreton a prophet's vision, undying optimism, and Lord Grey. By March, 1912, Hays pledged his word to Lord Grey to assign the lands. Moreton had offered Lord Grey nine-tenths of his claim for an immediate advance of cash. Grey wrote : "I implore you not again to make the mistake of losing the Leg of Mutton in your mouth in your endeavour to seize the Leg of Mutton reflected in the water." Hays was in London when Grey cornered him, but the documents were prepared for signature in Canada. Hays then sailed on the *Titanic* . . .

## MORETON FREWEN

Fate seemed to have chosen an iceberg to impede Moreton's fortunes in the West. Moreton accepted his fate : "It was in the eternal fitness of things in this prodigious case that he should go to the bottom without signing." The death of Hays was followed by "a plethora of broken promises". Henceforth Moreton could only fight a speculative claim by parting with illusory shares. He soon lost his majority interest and right bitter was his cry. The Grand Trunk would not arbitrate and gave up replying to his literary objurgation. By 1913 he wrote to Lord Grey in agony : "I brought back beautiful things home when I was young : Sulphides and Denver Trams. They were lied out by men in your connection. Here is the last property I shall ever retrieve. I am too old. If the lawyers are right, if Hays was not lying to you and had lived another fortnight, then I have waiting me several hundred acres of land which must, absolutely must be in fifty or a hundred years a solid portion of a terminal city . . ."

It was symbolic of Moreton's business all his life. Promises and lawsuits in the present and a dream city at the end of fifty years. Meantime he wrote joyously to all who supplied him with immediate loans, giving gay gilt for their gingerbread. Friendships wore thin or snapped. But Grey stood by him ever. The War postponed Rupert indefinitely, and he side-tracked his energies into a gigantic Empire Farm for the veterans in Canada. He chortled over his Committee :

## SUBLIME FAILURES

“ High and dry Tories with Socialists : the Minister of Labour, the Chairman of Lloyds, Dr. Jameson, a polyglot lot with Kipling to sing our songs ! ” In 1917 Grey went to Howick to die, and the last note of a splendid friendship was a pencilled page with “ a thousand heartfelt thanks for all the brightness your loyal and devoted affection has brought into my life ”. Moreton’s answer touched the heights : “ You will not fail us now that all things are about to be revealed. You are going to have the best of it, much the best of it ! You go in your beautiful Autumn before the winter frost has taken its dread toll, before the sedge is withered from the lake. You go to an endless Spring somewhere over the mountains, and to see sunsets far more splendid than we have seen on the Pacific, while we others take your trail in weariness . . . ”

Moreton’s Post-War dream was to float the Stars and Stripes from Santa Sofia with an American mandate spreading from the Golden Horn. “ That is the Peace Gibraltar and from that impregnable and beautiful Capital, the very throne of the world’s Big Business, Peace would be maintained.” But no one heard him in America, now Roosevelt had died. Moreton believed he was the last, who called him Theodore. “ You and I will emerge from war hermits,” wrote Henry James, and hermit he became at Brede. In the old Chapel of the haunted Manor he sat typewriting to the ends of the world. Surviving friends came down and replanted each other’s trees

## MORETON FREWEN

in the garden. He approached the shadows without relaxing hostility to Free Trader, Gold-bug, or Heron. He began writing his Memoirs of his great hunting days and of the ranching West and of Hyderabad and the Balkans, and he got no further. His pen ran a little quicksilver, and then he broke down.

He had lived all his years as seed-time and the approach of harvest found his barns unfilled. A faint religious hope began to flicker. He attended a seance and Lord Grey came through the shadows and advised Lord Rothermere as the man to guide England. But Moreton was too old to find a new leader. Something seemed due to his soul, and at the age of 70 he was confirmed in the Chapel at Brede Place by the Bishop of Mauritius. Without his wonderful cowboy's health, he could no longer throw off his devastating disappointments with a shoulder toss. He knew now that his bad luck was insurmountable. His very optimism appeared like a gigantic confidence trick he had played upon himself. His luck has been such that it would have led him to patent artesian wells the day before the Deluge or introduce safety matches on the day of the Great Fire of London. Everything had gone, his money and the money of others. As Halifax the Trimmer said : "a princely mind will undo a private family."

In March, 1921, he enjoyed a pleasant reception at the House of Commons, and made his last address on Indian Exchange. His last Testament was an

## SUBLIME FAILURES

appeal to Lord Cecil in which he confessed that the Currency Question with Love and Religion filled the asylums, but that “ manifest destiny points to a much lower value for money and a much higher value for land ”. Balfour wished to take him to Washington to help lobby but it was too late. He lay like a dying bull in the Sussex marshes, and only an occasional moan came through such as “ Stabilize the Exchange with Asia ! ” or, as he wrote to his staunch friend, Otto Kahn, “ had I achieved what I started out to do, which was to wrestle with the great twin forces human Stupidity and Cupidity . . . ” Schemes still moved through his brain like a slack tide out of the unvintaged sea, and found utterance on his type-writer. The St. Lawrence could be deepened . . . a Peace River Corporation . . . a hundred millions to fill the Treasury with good paper . . . Prince Rupert ! Rupert was written on his heart. He inked a last memoir. It was as though he had looked into the glass and seen the stare of Failure itself. The life he had so enjoyed proved after all but a ghastly pirouette with Fortune the jade, the jade ! As though to tantalize him with a last elusive dazzle a long cable arrived from the Canadian Premier, and he could write to Kahn : “ Here is a change in the spirit of the dream, the nightmare ! We have now the option dirt cheap. Sir Wilfred Laurier’s Folly they have been calling it. They will now see ! ”

A sudden stroke brought him to a lingering end, and he was moved to a home in Salisbury, where he

## MORETON FREWEN

had ridden the plains as a youthful horseman. In September, 1924, he was unhorsed for good, and he was buried amongst his ancestors in Northiam, where he awaits the forgiveness of debts and the resurrection of Silver.

Rudyard Kipling wrote all that was needed for an Epitaph : " He lived in every sense except what is called common sense, very richly and widely, to his own extreme content. If he had ever reached the golden crock of his dreams he would have perished. I remember him in India when he was at the top of his form. I am especially glad that you see the size of him because you have referred to him as " poor ", which is the one thing he was not. Later on when you have explained how wrong his Bimetallism was, you may see Wisdom justified of her amazing child in this particular. Also, which does not count for much now, of course he was wholly a Sahib."

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

These Studies are based on the Biographies and books stated in the text. Cardinal Newman and Lord Curzon are left mainly as Lord Ronaldshay and Wilfred Ward left them, but additional and, it is hoped, not disfiguring strokes have been made from the legend which accompanies both names. It has also been possible to converse with many who knew them in the land of the living. Mr. J. D. Gregory and Mr. Harold Nicolson have allowed me to make quotations from secretarial memoirs. In the case of Parnell, almost everybody, who knew him well, has recorded memories and without the restraint which attends general biography.

Coventry Patmore had also his biographers, who are dealt with in the text. Desire to fill missing sides of his many-faceted character has led to the Library at Greatham, where his best manuscripts and shreds of his letters and thought are preserved. Mrs. Meynell's exquisite Prelude to his *Sale Catalogue* is reproduced with permission. I have availed myself of family knowledge in the possession of Mr. Derek Patmore and of a recent article by Mr. Francis Patmore on his father in the *English Review*.

The study of Moreton Frewen is based on a longer manuscript Life, which I composed out of the large and vivid correspondences remaining in the archives of Brede Place as well as on his printed Memoirs, which appeared under the title of "Melton Mowbray" after his death. Commander Oswald Frewen allowed me access but I am responsible for the result. Mr. Rudyard Kipling kindly allowed some letters of his to be used and wrote the concluding one to the editor.

S. L.







UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY



100 996

UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY